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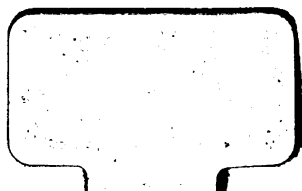
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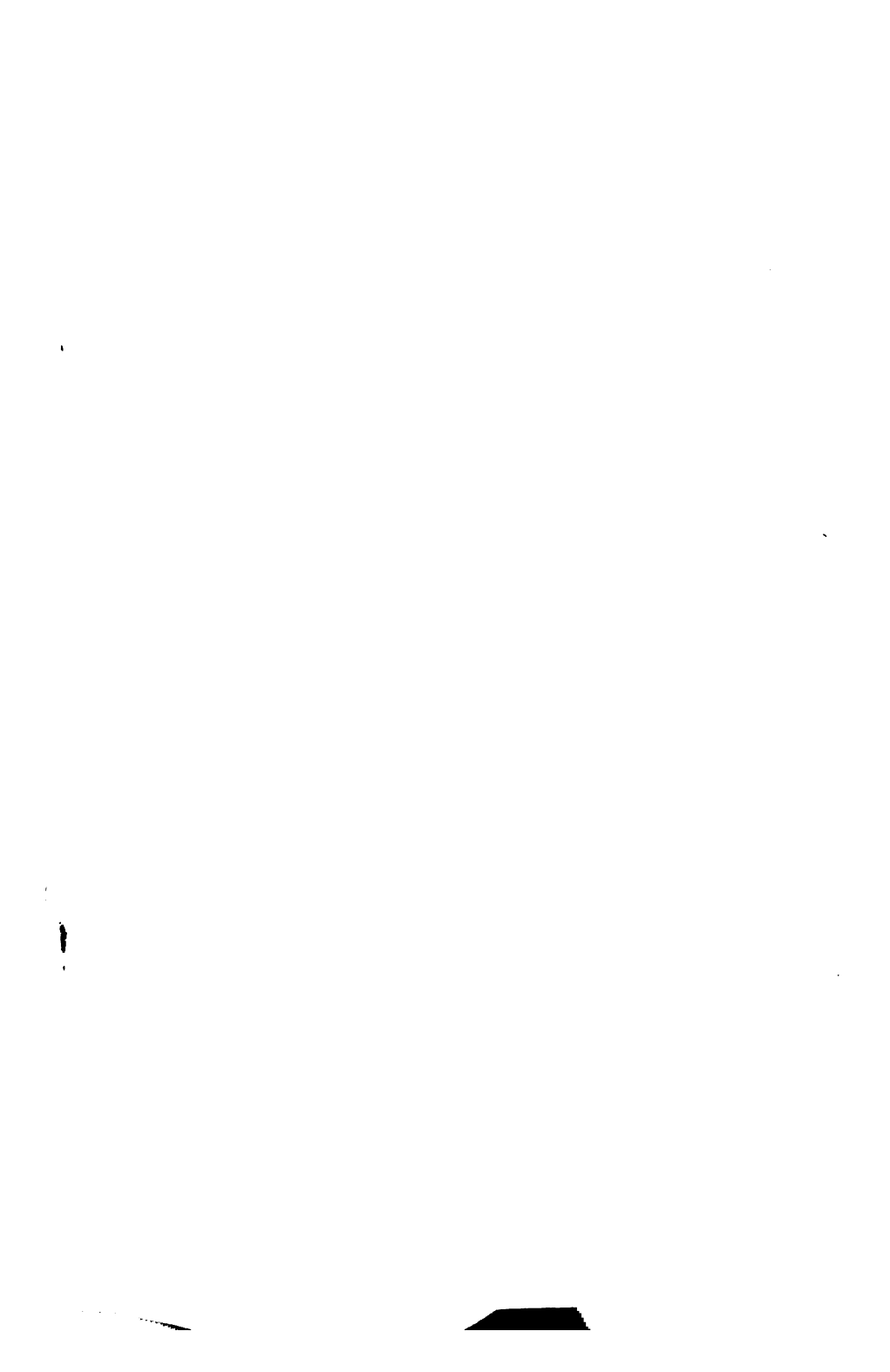
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PROSY JANE.



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PROSY JANE
OR
THE PURITAN'S BEQUEST.

BY
GREGORY GRAVES, M.A.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME II.



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PROSY JANE.

CHAPTER I.

*The Old Gallery, Castle Delamare,
April 18th.*

DEAREST EDMUND AND LUCY, — I concluded yesterday's letter with an account of Mr. Chesney being led captive to Alice's boudoir, there to be examined by three inexorable spinsters, as to the history of the deserted rooms in the north front of the Castle.

After a great deal of trouble on our part, and a great deal of evasion on his, we got at all he knew, dear Jane cross-questioning him and persecuting him far more than Alice or I did. This

is the sum of Mr. Chesney's revelations. I will call it the story of—

“SIR ARTHUR'S HALL.”

In the days of King Charles I. and of the Commonwealth, Sir Arthur Chesney was Lord of Castle Delamare. He was a zealous Puritan. In his time the castle was unoccupied, except the three north rooms which he himself inhabited. One of these rooms—the largest—was a banquetting-hall originally, but Sir Arthur, being a miser as well as a Puritan, made this room his home ; it served him as a sitting-room, a dining-room, a bed-room, and a church (for in those days Llan-devi Church was deserted). The next room, to the east of the large room, was used as a kitchen, a store-room, and a pantry. Beyond that, was a still smaller room, occupied by Sir Arthur's only servant, a rigid Puritan like himself, but of more various talents. Old Jedediah Howle was a minister, a soldier, a lawyer, a valet, and a cook. Accordingly, he could preach, or fight, or draw a lease, or wait at table, or turn a spit, as occasion

demanded. In Sir Arthur's service he had done all; and he was yet to do something else for his master which was different from all.

Sir Arthur Chesney's son and presumptive heir was Sir Lionel Chesney. He was a Royalist;—the Chesneys, save Sir Arthur, had always been Royalists and Legitimatists. Sir Lionel was not only a Royalist himself, but he loved the daughter of Sir Jasper Gwyn, another Royalist, who lived on an estate not far from Sir Arthur's, and with whom Sir Arthur had had many a public and private feud.

It was on the second night after the battle of Worcester that Sir Lionel Chesney, travel-worn and wounded, sought refuge in his father's Castle. The stern old Puritan, Sir Arthur, gave him shelter and food for the hour. Sir Arthur was pleased with his boy, by reason of the good tidings of Cromwell's victory which he brought to Castle Delamare. They sat late at their lonely meal, Sir Arthur and his son; they conversed freely; at last they came to high words, to mutual and bitter accusations. Jedediah Howle

heard it all, and was himself wrestling in prayer, when a pistol-shot aroused him from his meditations. He hurried to the banqueting hall, and there, over the corpse of his son, stood Sir Arthur Chesney ; prayerful and devout, and still vindictive. ‘Had he not done the work of the Lord ? Had he not followed in the steps of the Kenite’s wife, and, notwithstanding all ties of kindred and hospitality, slain a captain of the host of Canaan ?’ Why then, after such a virtuous and heroic deed, why did Sir Arthur and Jedediah, his servant, repent and tremble ? They dragged the corpse of that fair-haired boy into the adjoining chamber ; they left it there ; they barricaded every window and door in those accursed rooms ; they fled to the south side of the Castle, and never inhabited those rooms again, save, as was supposed, to carry out some fancied work of repentance or humiliation.

What passed between them is not known ; it is all matter of incoherent tradition, or else of probabilities hardly yet ascertained. They, with their own hands, and little by little, built up

every window and door that gave light or access to those rooms, except the door which communicated with the North-Western Tower: through that they came and went. It is said that they embalmed the poor youth's corpse, and left it unburied in the central room, as a kind of penance to themselves;—that they used to watch and pray over it. It is said that they spent days and weeks in endeavouring to erase the blood-stains from the stone-floor of the banqueting-hall. It is said that, when he was near his end, Sir Arthur caused an effigy of himself to be made, and that this effigy still sits at the table whereat he and his son supped on the night of the murder, and close to the spot where the floor is stained with blood. It is said that, with one hand, the effigy still points down to the blood-stains, and that with the other hand it points to a parchment scroll which lies on the table before it. It is said that that scroll is inscribed in large characters of the day; and that it contains a curse on any one of the Chesneys who shall ever enter that banqueting-hall, and a curse on any

man whatsoever who shall enter the room beyond."

Such was Mr. Chesney's story, given, as nearly as I can remember, in his own words ; and I don't think that my interest in the subject allowed me to lose any important sentence. Dear Jane was equally attentive, and remembers just what I do. When Mr. Chesney had concluded, I must confess that all of us were impressed with a solemnity which seemed to be infectious. However, we soon began to make remarks on the story, and then dear Jane asked him explicitly whether he and Sir Robert believed it ? He replied, that Sir Robert believed every word of it, and a good deal more beside, and that it was of no consequence whether he (Mr. Chesney) believed it or not. Neither he nor Alice would enter that room on any account. It would drive their father frantic if either of them proposed such a thing. It was one of those things on which no reason or argument would ever prevail with Sir Robert, come from whence it might.

This did not satisfy dear Jane as to Mr. Chesney's personal belief in the story. She kept up her inquiries, till at last he said that he would tell us something of the subsequent history of the north-rooms; and that then he would leave us to judge of his own sentiments on the subject.

Mr. Chesney's supplemental story was as follows:—

“SIR ARTHUR'S HALL” (*continued*).

“About fifty years after Sir Arthur Chesney's death, and in the time of Queen Anne, Castle Delamare was in the hands of Sir Rodolph Chesney. He was a great-nephew of Sir Arthur, and a young man of very dissolute habits. He was never married, and he came to an untimely end. He was succeeded in the estates by his brother, Sir Fitzroy, who was grandfather to the present Sir Robert.

Sir Rodolph Chesney's monument is in Llan-devi Church. The inscription relates that he and a friend of his were drowned at sea. That is no doubt the fact; but there is a story about

what happened two nights before they were drowned, which seems very relevant to the history of Sir Arthur's rooms.

It is said that Sir Rodolph and his friend, whose name was Digby, were that night the last of a band of wassailers who had been drinking deep in the present dining-room ; and that, in a spirit of mere recklessness, Sir Rodolph proposed to his friend that they should make a torch-light survey of the north rooms. Certain it is that such a survey was made that night, and that the only servant who could be got to accompany them was Mr. Digby's groom. All that is known of what passed was ascertained subsequently from this man. He stated that when Sir Rodolph and Mr. Digby had looked at the figure which sat in the middle of the hall, the sight seemed nearly to sober them ; at least that they left off jeering and boasting, and spoke in whispers. They examined the figure with their torches ; they found the blood-stains on the floor, between the figure and the hearth ; and they blew the dust from off the scroll at which the

figure pointed. They either read it imperfectly or could not agree as to its meaning. They disputed about it; and at last Mr. Digby said that the writing should not terrify him and that he would search the rooms beyond. Sir Rodolph did not follow Mr. Digby, but the servant did. They found what tradition had led them to expect,—a skeleton. It lay in an open coffin, which coffin was raised on a bier, and stood in the centre of the room. Of the murdered man's dress and accoutrements many vestiges remained. His breastplate was entire, his spurs lay at his feet, a jewelled ring still shone on his hand, his sword was by his side. His long hair lay in two dusty heaps on either side the skull; the skull, that was driven in and shattered where the pistol bullet had entered the right temple.

Mr. Digby and his servant stayed no longer. They hurried back to the hall and found Sir Rodolph pale and horror-stricken as themselves, but still poring over the strange scroll and trying to copy it. When they quitted the north rooms, the servant was dismissed to bed, but

neither Sir Rodolph nor Mr. Digby slept that night. They remained in conference till morning dawned. At that time there was an old man living in a solitary hovel on the sea-coast, who was said to have been of kin to Jedediah Howle, the Puritan minister, and who was also said to have some traditionary knowledge about a subterranean passage which was believed to communicate with Sir Arthur's rooms. This old man was summoned to the Castle. Induced by a handsome reward and accompanied only by Sir Rodolph, by Mr. Digby, and by Mr. Digby's servant, he pointed out the spot where that passage could be entered from without. The said entrance was soon found, and, by the exertions of the four persons engaged, was speedily opened. The passage beyond was examined by torch-light. It was found to be wide, and sufficiently high for a tall man to stand upright therein. It led to a stone staircase, and, at the top of that, was a large trap-door which opened by pressure from below.

The party of four ascended, but Mr. Digby

and his servant saw at once that the room in which they now stood was not one of the rooms which they had visited the night before: it was smaller than either, and it had an oaken floor, whereas the other rooms were paved with stone. A brief search revealed to the party a door to the right, they passed it, and they now stood in the room where the skeleton lay. Sir Rodolph made the same cursory observations in that room as Mr. Digby had made the night before. Sir Rodolph removed the ring from the hand of the skeleton and placed it on his own finger. Sir Rodolph asked the old man if he had ever been in that room before. The old man denied it. Sir Rodolph asked the old man if he had had any previous knowledge of what was in that room. The old man said that he had heard how 'Sir Lionel lay there;' but he would not tell where or how he had heard it. Sir Rodolph asked the old man if he dared to venture, with one other of the party, into the third room,—into Sir Arthur's hall. The old man hesitated for a time, but said at last that

he was willing to go further, if Sir Rodolph did not follow. It was at length agreed that the old man and Mr. Digby's servant should go into Sir Arthur's Hall. All that Sir Rodolph wanted them to do, was to cross the said hall, to lock and bar the further door (that which communicated with the north-western tower), and to bring the key back to him. This was done; and, both in going and coming, Mr. Digby's servant observed that the old man never raised his eyes to look at the figure that sat at the table in the middle of the hall.

By Sir Rodolph's instructions the whole party now set to work to remove the coffin and its contents from the room where it lay. They carried it through the smaller room; and down the stone-staircase and along the subterranean passage and out into the open air. They laid it down among the thick bushes. They then returned, all four, to the room which they had just left. There was nothing else to bring away, save the coffin-lid. Sir Rodolph would not have the bier removed. It was made of wicker-work,

and was decayed. Before they left the room, Sir Rodolph said to Mr. Digby, ' See, Digby, I leave this key on the bier. If, after my time, any inquiry should be made about it, you will tell my successors where to find it.' Sir Rodolph's voice shook when he said this : he trembled violently. They, all four, now left the north rooms ; they adjusted the lid of Sir Lionel's coffin. Working altogether, they filled up the entrance to the subterranean passage with stones and rubbish. They then left the spot ; but soon after nightfall, by Sir Rodolph's instructions, all four met again. They carried Sir Lionel's coffin to Llandeви Church, and placed it in a vault which, at that time, was the burial-place of the Chesneys, but in which there is now no longer any room. Sir Rodolph Chesney and his friend, Henry Digby, both sleep in that vault. They were laid there, side by side, on the sixth day after that in which they assisted to bury Sir Lionel."

I leave you to judge, dear Lucy, of the numbers

of questions which were asked and discussed in Alice's boudoir when Mr. Chesney's story was concluded. I will repeat some of them—

“How did Sir Rodolph and Mr. Digby meet with their deaths?” asked Jane.

“On the day after Sir Lionel's burial, they went out fishing in a sailing-boat. A sudden squall upset the boat, when they were not a mile from land. They were both drowned. Mr. Digby's servant and another man, a sailor, who was with them, kept above water till they were rescued by some fishermen. The tide was going out at the time, but, when it turned, the bodies of Sir Rodolph and Mr. Digby were washed ashore.”

“And what has become of Sir Lionel's ring?” asked I.

“I have it still. I will show it you some day. It is a sapphire ring, and a very beautiful one. There is a name engraved inside; the name of Gwendoline. That was the name of Sir Lionel's betrothed; Gwendoline Gwyn. It was about her, I have been told, that Sir Arthur and his

son were quarrelling when the poor youth was murdered."

"I am thankful that Sir Arthur was no ancestor of ours," said Alice.

"What became of Gwendoline Gwyn?" asked dear Jane.

"She died broken-hearted. She never knew of Sir Lionel's murder. They told her, what many believed, that he had fallen at Worcester."

"Where did Sir Jasper Gwyn live?" asked I.

"At Capel Park. It is five miles from hence."

"That is Lord Glenarvon's place, is it not?" said Jane.

"Yes; Lord Glenarvon is himself a Gwyn. He is descended from a brother of Gwendoline. Is it not so, Alice?"

"I believe so," said Alice.

"What became of the old man who pointed out the subterranean passage?" asked I.

"We have never heard. Sir Rodolph rewarded both him and Mr. Digby's servant very handsomely when they had buried Sir Lionel. The servant thought that Sir Rodolph bribed the old

man to leave the neighbourhood. He had a granddaughter, but neither he nor his granddaughter could be traced afterwards. It looks as if he kept the secrets that had been intrusted to him."

"And what became of Mr. Digby's man?" asked dear Jane.

"He lived to a good old age. He remained in the service of the Chesneys till his death. He was a faithful and honest man. He never betrayed a word about the secret of the North rooms."

"How is that known?" asked dear Jane.

"We have a manuscript account of all that my grandfather, Sir William, could ascertain about the North rooms. Sir William, who saw John Gerard in his last moments, certifies that John Gerard's secrecy had been maintained to the last."

"Is Mr. Gerard, your present butler, of the same family as John Gerard?" asked dear Jane.

"He is his great-grandson, and worthy of the name."

"Does he know about the North rooms?" asked I.

"No; I believe not. He may have some general impression that there is a story connected with them, and that we avoid the subject. You see, dears, that the chief reason of all this secrecy is to keep the thing away from the servants. The Welsh are very superstitious; and you have no idea of the household mischief that would result, if these stories got wind. The facts themselves are shocking and fearful enough, without being exaggerated by popular interpretation."

"I don't see yet," remarked Jane, "what the visiting of these rooms had to do with Sir Rodolph's death."

"I forgot to tell you," said Mr. Chesney, "that, just before the old man went away, he asked John Gerard whether 'Sir Rodolph had not been in Sir Arthur's hall the night before?' When John Gerard said 'Yes,' the old man exclaimed, 'That should not have been. I had thought to hinder that. Death will be in the Castle before another moon.' John Gerard asked the old man

to explain himself, but he would answer nothing explicitly. He kept repeating the words, 'It is the curse ; it is the curse !' "

"Then," said I, "the penalty of visiting Sir Arthur's Hall seems only to attach to a Chesney. I thought you said, Sir, that there was also a threat against any one who visited the room beyond? "

"So there is, Sophy ; not against any *one*, but against any *man*. All those limitations and particulars are gathered from what Sir William wrote by John Gerard's information. John Gerard heard a great deal that passed between Sir Rodolph and Mr. Digby when they spoke about the scroll. *My* only remaining curiosity is to know the exact words that are written on that scroll. The copy was lost, if Sir Rodolph made a copy."

"I will go and copy it, Sir," said dear courageous Jane, "if you will give me a light, and open the door. I can read old writing, Sir."

I said that Jane should not go ; but that, if she went, I would go too.

Mr. Chesney stared at us both; and so did Alice. Alice said that her father would be horrified to hear such a proposal, even if it were only made in jest. Mr. Chesney added quite sternly, "And I forbid you to think of it, Jane."

Jane did not mind this. She went on, in her own quiet way, and said—

"I want to know, Mr. Chesney, what made John Gerard think that the threat was only against any *man* who entered that further room? It would seem, Sir, that women are safe."

"John Gerard heard his master say to Sir Rodolph, as they read the scroll, 'What a pity we did not bring Stella with us! She might safely go onward; and would enjoy the adventure. However, I will run the risk myself, though I *am* a man, and though I *have* read the scroll.' That was what John Gerard heard his master say. He remembered the exact words. And again, when his master was drowning, and John Gerard would not leave him, his master's last words were, 'Save yourself, Gerard, and leave me. I am a doomed man. I read the curse, and I defied it.' And then Mr. Digby sank."

After this we were all silent for some moments; for it did seem so very shocking. And then I (always getting myself into scrapes) asked Mr. Chesney who Stella was ?

“ You had better not have asked, Sophy,” said Alice. “ I believe she was Sir Rodolph’s mistress.”

While I was subsiding, dear Jane drew attention from me by saying “ It seems, then, that there is no danger for a female at all, whatever she reads or wherever she goes.”

“ You remind me,” said Mr. Chesney, “ that Sir William states that the scroll contains a promise as well as a curse ; and that the promise was also supposed to be in favour of a woman. This tradition, Sir William says, originated in a source far anterior to Sir Rodolph’s adventure. Sir William fancied that it was first derived from Jedediah Howle himself.”

“ Is the promise to a woman of the Chesney family ?” I asked.

“ Sir William does not say. I don’t think he formed an opinion on the subject. He had heard that the promise was couched in figurative lan-

guage, and that it was only *supposed* to be in favour of a woman."

"Then Sir William never saw any copy of the legend himself?" said Jane.

"No! he expressly says not. He says that Sir Rodolph, according to John Gerard, made a copy of it in pencil, while he (Sir Rodolph) was in the Hall; but that that copy was never seen afterwards, and was most likely inaccurate."

Jane and I again petitioned to be allowed to visit Sir Arthur's Hall; but our prayers were in vain. We both felt that, if there was any danger, it did not threaten us; and moreover that, if the danger threatened the Chesneys, it would be well to ascertain exactly what it was, so that it might be avoided. Our arguments were all in vain; so at last dear Jane inquired whether any further examination of Sir Lionel's coffin had ever been made, since it was put in the vault at Llandevi.

"Yes," said Mr. Chesney, "Sir William examined it, and I have examined it myself. It contains nothing but what John Gerard had described."

Here our conversation in the boudoir ended. Afterwards, I went with Sir Robert Chesney one of his longest rounds. He had not nearly the objection, which I expected, to converse on the subject of Sir Arthur's Hall. Of course I led him on to it by degrees, starting with the subject of the robbery in Mr. Vaughan's room. Sir Robert went over the whole story with me ; every point was discussed ; and I found out that he has no such great horror of the North rooms being examined. His great fears are as strong as ever, viz. lest Mr. Chesney or Alice should enter those rooms ; or lest the servants should begin to inquire into the subject. He cautioned me against making any observation or asking any question in the presence of the servants ; but he did not seem the least to mind Jane and me knowing all the story. At last he let out, confidentially, that he had always made the most of his apprehensions to Robert and Alice ; because he really had great fear on their account, and he wished to inspire them with it. He had no fear for any one else. "You see, my dear," he concluded, "that John

Gerard visited those rooms with impunity, probably because he went in a reverential and obedient spirit; and some one visited them on Tuesday night, not in a proper spirit, perhaps, but still with apparent impunity."

So, you will perceive, dear Edmund and Lucy, that Jane and I shall get our own way with Sir Robert at last.

I have now done with Wednesday, and come to Thursday morning, when some further mystery about the robbery was cleared up, and some further suspicion created against Richard Pugh.

First, the labelled key of Mr. Vaughan's office, the key which ought to have been in Mrs. Hughes's room, was found. It was found on a grass-plot in Alice's flower-garden by a man who was mowing. Close to where it lay, some one, apparently a female, had run over the flower-beds, and left her footmarks quite plain. It was not in the part of the flower-garden which Rollo had crossed in the pursuit on Tuesday night, but the footsteps pointed towards the same walk in the shrubbery beyond,

down which Rollo afterwards led Mr. Chesney. Mr. Chesney, on hearing and observing all this, began to inquire about the female servants, whether they had all been in their rooms on Tuesday night. Mrs. Hughes found that they had ; all except Sarah Dean. She was at her home, at Mynot. Mrs. Hughes had given her a holiday. She went on Saturday and was to return to-day, but she has not yet arrived.

It next transpired that Mary Price, Alice's maid, had seen Sarah Dean inside the Castle on Tuesday night. Sarah Dean is kitchen-maid, and Mary Price saw her in the back-kitchen and spoke to her. This was about half-past ten on Tuesday night. The other servants were all gone to bed. What brought Mary Price down was, that her mistress sent her for hot water. She was not surprised to see Sarah Dean in the back-kitchen. She did not know that Sarah Dean had leave for a holiday and was supposed to be away from the Castle. Mary thought that the girl was up late for the purpose of making up the kitchen-fire ; but she did not think much about it, as there was

nothing in the girl's manner or appearance that attracted her attention. What she said to her was probably "Well, Sarah," or "Good night, Sarah," or some such ordinary words. Mary was sure that Sarah Dean had not her shawl or bonnet on. That would have attracted Mary's attention.

And now Giles, the under-butler, came to Mr. Chesney. Giles had been with Mr. Chesney and the constables, when they went to look for Pugh on the sea-shore. Giles said he was sure that the girl who was seen with Richard Pugh, and who left him before the constables came up, was Sarah Dean. He had not recognised her at the time, but, now that her movements of late came to be inquired about, he remembered enough to be sure that it was she. Several more facts now seem to point suspicion to Sarah Dean as having been concerned in the robbery of Tuesday night. The footsteps in the flower-garden, and other footsteps near where the park-wall was scaled, correspond with hers. She has been seen by several in the company of Richard Pugh since Saturday. Though she has not returned to the

Castle, she has left her home at Mynot,—left it yesterday and has not been seen since.

I have continued writing till the last moment allowed by postal regulations. Fondest love to Aunt and yourselves.

Your affectionate Sister,

SOPHIA.

P.S.—George will write to-morrow, and tell you all the more general news; and of his own exploits on the Devi.

CHAPTER II.

READERS, I will not insert Mr. George Bentley's letter of April 19th. It dwells chiefly on subjects which I fancy you do not all appreciate. I do not wish to detract from Mr. George Bentley's merits as an enthusiastic angler, or to insinuate that his exploits on the Devi were not practically equal to his own description thereof. I believe that George Bentley told the truth about everything, and told the truth where youths of his age are somewhat apt to exaggerate, to wit, about their own achievements. No doubt that, in respect of truths George Bentley had had the advantages of a good education and the best ex-

amples. We will pass at once to Sophia Bentley's next letter to Gossett Grange.

Castle Delamare,

April 21st.

DEAREST EDMUND AND LUCY,—I told you in my last, finished on Friday evening, that dear Jane and I would get our own way about exploring the deserted rooms here. At length, by dint of unanimity and perseverance, we have gained our end. It is chiefly due to the influence which dear Jane exercises over every one who comes near her, that the obstacles were surmounted. Jane was determined to succeed, and when Jane had made up her mind to succeed, I knew that success was not far off. I had won Sir Robert over to our cause before Friday night. He agreed that dear Jane and I should do whatever we liked about the north rooms, provided that Mr. Chesney and Alice were not expected to enter them, and provided that the servants did not know what was going on.

Saturday and Sunday passed, and meanwhile dear Jane had persuaded Mr. Chesney and Alice

that she was to have her own way. I don't know how she did it, sweet darling, but she did it. We all know how it is dear Jane's way to do everything she likes, without showing how she does it. To proceed. This morning, at eight o'clock, Mr. Chesney, Jane, and I met in Mr. Vaughan's room in the north-west tower. Mr. Chesney, who is a good mechanic, had some tools with him; Jane and I had candles, and Jane had writing materials. Mr. Chesney cut out a panel of the door which led into Sir Arthur's Hall. He put his hand through the space thus opened. The key was in the lock, and it turned easily. The door swung open. It was not barred as well as locked. We had feared that it was.

Dear Jane and I didn't think much about the cold rush of air, or the darkness beyond, or the cobwebs or damp. Dear Jane's look was as calm and her cheek as rosy as it has been of late, since we came here. If Jane showed that she did not feel any hesitation at that moment, it made me equally confident. I knew that where Jane led I might safely follow. If any one was nervous, it

was Mr. Chesney. He would continue talking and giving us all sorts of ridiculous advice ; and then, when dear Jane was on the point of entering the room, he declared that, if she went he, must follow. Jane turned round, and I must think she spoke to him rather unfeelingly, considering his evident anxiety. I don't like to see dear Jane speak reprovingly to any one. I feel afraid lest she should ever speak so to me. I trust she never may.

She turned from Mr. Chesney, and led the way into Sir Arthur's Hall, I following close to her, Mr. Chesney remaining in Mr. Vaughan's room. Dear Jane held her candle high up for a long time before we could make out the dark figure sitting in the middle of the hall. But there it was, with its high Covenanter's hat, and everything as Mr. Chesney had described it. Everything was the same, except that the figure did not point with one hand at the scroll and with the other hand at the floor. It sat sideways, and with its right hand it pointed at a door which stood beyond it, and with its left hand it pointed at

something which lay on the table, underneath the hand. The figure was turned away from the hearth, and from the spot on the floor where we expected to find the blood-stains. For these we looked first, and found them instantly. Dear Jane's dress had swept the dust from the floor as she turned the corner of the table; and there, where the brave and hopeful heart had ceased to beat, there lay the evidence of the murder, red and shocking, as though it had been shed but yesterday.

Dear Jane looked very sad now. I could not take my eyes off her. Presently she rose from her knees, for we had both knelt down, I know not why, and she began to clear the dust from under the left hand of the figure. There, underneath the hand and the dust, was the legendary scroll. Jane did not stop to read it through. I saw that she could read it with ease. She took her pencil and paper and began to copy it. While she was thus engaged, who should appear upon the stage but dear, faithful Rollo. He came from Mr. Vaughan's room, not bounding up, as he used

to do, but walking mournfully along, as if he felt the solemnity of the scene. He came up to me and placed his beautiful head on my arm ; and then I thought that, while Jane was copying the Legend, Rollo and I would look into the two rooms beyond. It took us but a few minutes.

In the first room was the bier, before spoken of, but nothing else. The black cloth was still hanging on it, but it and the bier were decayed and covered with dust. I saw in the dust, clearly, a place where a key had lain ;—where it must have lain for years while the dust was accumulating. It had evidently been removed but recently, and I knew that the key which had lain there must be the key which the robber had used to get into Mr. Vaughan's room and which Mr. Chesney had just now found in the lock of Mr. Vaughan's room-door.

I passed on to the third room. It was empty, but the trap-door, above spoken of, was open. Rollo went up to it and went a few steps down the stair-case below, but returned back to me directly, wagging his tail. I thought it well to close the

trap-door, for I concluded that it had been only opened by Richard Pugh,—by the thief or thieves, I mean, who had retreated that way on Tuesday night. The trap-door was too heavy for me to close with one hand, so I put my candle on the ground and tried to close it with two. It proved too heavy for me, nevertheless; and I was obliged to let it go before it was down. It closed with a bang which blew my candle out. I was frightened at first, but I soon recollected that I had provided myself with match-lights, and could remedy the disaster without calling to dear Jane. When I relighted my candle, we, Rollo and I, left the further room, and then the middle room; and I closed each of the doors as we passed them. We were now in Sir Arthur's Hall again. Just as I closed the second door I saw dear Jane coming towards me, looking rather anxious. She said, "Sophy, it would have been better if you had waited here till I had finished the Legend. I am not quite sure what it means." Dear Jane then returned to the table and spent five minutes more in finishing her copy. She did not consult me, as her words had

led me to expect. As soon as she had finished, we left Sir Arthur's Hall, and, while we were shaking and dusting ourselves in Mr. Vaughan's room, Mr. Chesney was refitting the panel into the door of Sir Arthur's Hall. When he had done that, he locked the said door from the side on which we stood and brought away the key with him.

We adjourned to Alice's Boudoir and recounted to her our joint and several adventures : and then dear, clever Jane produced her copy of the scroll with every word and letter formed as it was in the original. She first transcribed it in a modern hand, and then read it aloud to us. It ran as follows :—

“ When Chesney wight doth enter here,
Doom is spoken, death is near.
Who readeth this, let him beware
To pass by me, and enter there.
When Devi shall to Dulas flow,
The curse will end, and I shall go.”

To tell you all the criticisms which ensued when Jane read and re-read this stanza ; how Mr. Chesney and Alice shook their heads ; how Sir Robert joined the council, heard the rhymes and shook

his head also ; how Rollo looked the wisest and the least puzzled of the party,—is more than I can engage to do.

First it was decided that Alice might safely visit Sir Arthur's Hall, because she was not a *wight* ; but Sir Robert and his son were *wights*, and must not adventure. This decision was not, however, quite unanimous. Mr. Chesney was inclined, as he expressed it, "to reserve a point as to whether the gender of the word *wight* was not common." Dear Jane said that *wight* was always masculine, and the majority followed dear Jane, evidently because we knew nothing about the question, and because she, dear, clever soul, did.

We next commented on the probability that the old man, Howle's kinsman, knew all about the Legend, and was therefore so alarmed when he heard that Sir Rodolph had visited Sir Arthur's Hall. Mr. Chesney now told us that he had been looking at Sir William Chesney's Manuscript and had found that the old man's name was Howle, Ephraim Howle : and that he was a nephew of Jedediah Howle, the Puritan.

We next agreed that the second danger was not necessarily the danger of death, and that it was only threatened to the man who, having read the scroll, should, in defiance of its warning, pass by Sir Arthur's effigy, and enter the room to which Sir Arthur's right hand pointed, viz. the room in which the bier stood. Mr. Digby's fate was of course an illustration of this theory. Dear Jane thought that, though I was very far removed from any similarity to a man, yet that she should not have felt quite comfortable if, previously to visiting those further rooms, I had read or attempted to read that scroll. To this Sir Robert assented, pressing my hand at the same time, as though congratulating me on a narrow escape.

But now came the great difficulty of all ; that involved in the fifth line of the stanza. Where was Dulas ? what was Dulas ? How could the Devi be made to flow to Dulas ?

"Dulas," said Mr. Chesney, "is a name common to very many Welsh rivers and streams. Some, which are not so called now, once had the name. There is no Dulas that I know of any-

where near here, or near the upper course of the Devi."

I suggested that the removal of the curse might perhaps have something to do with Mr. Chesney's proposed plans of irrigation, whereby the Devi would certainly be diverted into a new channel. As I could give no etymological grounds for my theory, they only laughed at me, except Sir Robert, who said that he thought it a very clever idea.

Dear Jane couldn't make out how the theory had arisen that the stanza promised something to the mediation of a woman. Of course, it was these two last lines, if any, which involved such a promise, but how could that be? Were the rivers of Wales, like the Severn, supposed to be feminine? Mr. Chesney did not know; and so we were obliged to give up the problem.

To tell the truth, I am rather glad to feel that all the excitement consequent upon last week's robbery will now die away. I wish I could take

everything as philosophically as dear Jane. She is a marvel to us all.

Sarah Dean has not yet been heard of, nor has Richard Pugh been again seen in the neighbourhood. Jane and I trust never to hear or see more of him. We feel quite nervous about such a reckless and wicked character being near to those we love. Would that the poor girl, whom he has deluded from her home, could be rescued !

What an escape Mary Price has had !

George nas probably told you in detail of many pleasant excursions which in my last letter I was obliged to pass over. Perhaps also he has told you how kind Lord Glenarvon has been to him in the way of invitations to fish at Capel Park, and so forth. But dear George's modesty may have prevented his seeing what Alice and Jane and I have all observed, viz. that Lord G. has taken a great liking for George. Lord G. is over here very often, coming and going very much as he pleases, fishing with George, farming and engineering with Mr. Vaughan, or talking on political or social subjects with Sir-Robert. Some-

times he dines here; always, if there are any other dinner-guests, besides those who are staying in the house. Jane and I quite wonder at ourselves now, for ever having thought Lord G. a proud man. He is kind and affable in manner to both of us, and often puts himself out of the way to give us some passing pleasure; and George, as you know, he patronizes incessantly. We think that Lord Glenarvon must have had some trouble on his mind the day we first met him; our impression of him was so different to what it is now. In one respect he is unchanged, viz., in his manner towards Alice. Jane and I cannot help thinking that Lord G. positively dislikes dear Alice. We are very sorry to see it, but we cannot say that it is wholly a surprise to us. Really, Alice seems to deserve it. You, who have seen her so gay and natural in our home, cannot have an idea of the Alice we now see almost daily in the company of Lord Glenarvon,—so cold, so haughty, so determined to show him none but that studied politeness which looks so like incivility and mistrust. Jane

and I have frequently remonstrated with Alice on the subject. She never avoids it, but yet never enters deeply into it. She puts us off, in fact, with some such words as these :—

“ Oh ! his lordship and I are the best of friends, I assure you, dears ; we understand each other perfectly. He does not, as you suppose, dislike me ; if he does, I cannot help it. The dislike is entirely on his side. I like him particularly, but I don’t choose to show it on all occasions. He is quite an exceptional person, I assure you ; very proud and capable of being tyrannical ; very sarcastic, and therefore capable of being cruel. To encourage such tendencies by too much deference, or by anything like timidity, would only be to do him an injury.”

Jane and I cannot understand this, but it is not perhaps necessary that we should. Alice and Lord G. have known each other from childhood, and Lord G.’s mother quite adores Alice. This could not be if Alice had not some justification for her *hauteur*.

Dear Jane does not consider Mr. Chesney to

be looking well, or to have gained any strength during the last fortnight. No wonder, if the recent alarms and anxieties have thrown him back a little. Dear Jane has obtained a promise from him that he will not sit up after eleven o'clock at night, without her previous permission. Nothing pleases Alice so much as to see her brother "obliged to give up his own way," as she expresses it. But the authority asserted by dear Jane is very gentle. Its essence is, that Mr. Chesney would sacrifice anything rather than occasion her anxiety.

Sir Robert is well and active as ever, and has taken "naughty Sophy" quite into favour again. The slate-quarry on Dinas Hill is promising wonders. Mr. Vaughan has just passed by to his office and told me so. Fondest love to Aunt and yourselves from,

Your affectionate sister,

SOPHIA.

Gossett Grange,

April 23.

DEAREST SOPHY AND JANE,—I write rather hurriedly, but do not like to wait another day without giving some answer to dear Sophy's long and most interesting letters. The letter of Friday last threw dear Aunt into a little trepidation, and she wished me to write to you at once and beg of you not to have anything more to do with the mysteries of "Sir Arthur's Hall." I was half-inclined to be nervous about it myself, but Edmund persuaded us both not to interfere. "Sophy will engage in nothing without Jane's approval," he said, "so you may be sure all will be right." The fact is that Edmund was inordinately curious on the subject himself; that was quite evident. Moreover, I begin to doubt whether there is not a strong element of romance under that quiet and demure exterior with which the younger Miss Bentley is masked.

I must speak to you now, dears, on a more personal, but not, I hope, a selfish question. Aunt and Edmund have both been pressing on

my notice a circumstance which I do not affect to be blind to any longer, viz. that much of Mr. T.'s kindness and attention here is directed to myself; and that the time is come when I must either recognise or discourage it. My own inclination is, I freely confess, in the former direction. I hope that I feel the solemn responsibility of such an admission, and that I entertain all the sentiments which are necessary to justify it. But this is not *all* with me. My first and present duty, my fondest affections are yet with the dear ones at home. Before I go further, I must know from both of you that, in any change of this kind, I not only have your best wishes but your cordial sympathies. I will say nothing to bias your judgment; I will not even tell you the opinions which Aunt and Edmund have already expressed. When you write, dears, tell me not only what you wish, but all that you think.

I can tell you nothing very encouraging about the state of things in the parish. They are no worse, and, I fear, no better; but we do not feel them so much.

On the farm, we cannot expect any real prosperity till another spring. Edmund's expression is that "this is a dead year for Gossett Farm." So now we know the worst. The one person who is utterly fearless and unconcerned is dear Aunt. If any one ever believed in a special Providence, it is she. "Everything is for the best" with her; and yet she never neglects the merest care or exercise of daily life. Dear Jane is the only one of her nieces who really resembles her. You and I, Sophy, will not be jealous. When either of us quit the 'dear old home,' we shall not have to reflect that we were essential to its prosperity, and yet we may hope, leaving such a home as ours, to carry a blessing with us into another sphere.

With fondest love from all to all,

Your affectionate Sister,

LUCY.

The Old Gallery, Castle Delamare,

April 25th.

My dearest Lu,—By dear Jane's wish, I answer

your letter. I am going to dismiss all the sentimentalities usual to such answers, and tell you a plain simple fact, viz. that dear Jane and I talked of and thought of *the subject* long before you did, and both agreed in devoutly wishing that our dream might some day prove a reality. And, Lu dearest, only think of the one greatest advantage and blessing which you have omitted. Instead of being separated, we shall have two homes within a mile of each other. Jane is either rather wicked, or intensely practical, this morning. "Tell Lucy that no one is better informed than she is as to our esteem for Mr. T., and the grounds of it, and that we are not going to gratify her vanity by empty reiterations." That is dear Jane's message to her eldest sister; but when you have said "yes," dear Lu, then you are to give Mr. T. our love and warmest congratulations, and anything else you may think it proper to bestow on our behalf.

There is no news of any kind since my last, except that George has been staying two days at Capel Park, and enjoyed himself. He re-

turned to us this morning, and then we both were struck with the very decided improvement in his looks, which has resulted from his stay in Pembrokeshire. He is truly delighted with the news we had for him, and sends you his best love, but quaintly remarks that "it will not be becoming to say too much till the fish be landed."

Fondest love to Aunt, and Edmund, and yourself.

Your affectionate Sister,

SOPHIA.

CHAPTER III.

ON the morning following that on which Sophia Bentley wrote the last letter, she was sitting with Miss Chesney in the boudoir when Lord Glenarvon was announced. It was early; not long after ten o'clock. Sophia rose to leave the room; Miss Chesney begged her, rather pointedly, to remain. Sophia, with somewhat of a mischievous look, alleged an engagement with Sir Robert, and quitted the boudoir just as Lord Glenarvon entered it. Lord Glenarvon and Sophia shook hands as they passed each other; Miss Chesney called aloud after Sophia;—Sophia vanished, nevertheless.

“Good morning, Miss Chesney. I fear I have

driven Miss Bentley away. I trust that so early a visit is not an intrusion."

"Good morning, Lord Glenarvon. I assume that your visit has some special object which precludes the idea of intrusion."

"I wished to explain my note of yesterday, Miss Chesney."

"It needs not, my Lord. No explanation, but a full apology will be understood."

"I cannot apologize for the whole of the note, Miss Chesney, if that is what you intend by a *full* apology. I still maintain that your demeanour on several recent occasions has been unnecessarily and harshly distant."

"My demeanour has been, and will be, guided by the understanding which we both agreed to, my Lord."

"Pardon me, Miss Chesney; *you* dictated the understanding. It was a humiliating one for me; but I accepted it, deeming that you would enforce no part of it that was not necessary to your object. Instead of that, you have interpreted it, and acted upon it, with increasing rigour."

"You spoke of my *object*, Lord Glenarvon. Do you know then what my object was?"

"Yes surely! It was that your father should not know of our engagement till you felt that your duty would allow you to leave him,—till your brother married in short."

"That was not my *whole* object, Lord Glenarvon."

"It was the only object you alleged, Miss Chesney."

"And the only one I intend to allege at present, my Lord."

"Then you insist on my acceptance of the harshest terms; and will not give me your whole reasons for the exaction."

"You may call the terms *harsh*, my Lord, if you please; and I refuse to mitigate them, or to give the reasons of my refusal. But as to insisting on your acceptance of them, you are at full liberty to reconsider that."

"Say that it is your own wish to put an end to our understanding, Miss Chesney."

"I shall say nothing that is untrue, Lord Glenarvon. I have no such wish; but I will not

have the understanding tampered with. If you view it as a *mis*understanding, that is your question. I do not. I mean to abide by it so long as you wish it to exist."

"Do you think, Miss Chesney, do you think that if Robert Chesney knew of your conduct, and of my remonstrance, that he would justify you rather than me?"

"I think he would justify you, my Lord, or at all events he would try to persuade me. You are welcome to that supposition. My brother's knowledge of the matter is your knowledge, and your view would probably become his. But neither of you know my reasons, nor do I intend to appeal to either of you as to their validity."

"Oh! I am not going to utter complaints to your brother, Miss Chesney, for the sake of obtaining his sympathy. It is your sympathy alone that I covet."

"And you have it, my Lord; for I grieve to see a noble-minded man complaining like a child, and writing angry letters, which he apologizes for the next day."

"Yes, Miss Chesney! you would like him to

bear the torture better, in order that you might inflict more of it."

"I am sorry that that is your opinion of me, my Lord. It does not indicate a bright prospect for either of us."

"Do you love me, Alice Chesney?"

"I have told you once, my Lord. I have not changed my mind since."

"Notwithstanding the childishness, Alice?"

"Notwithstanding the childishness, Francis."

"Alice, I used the word 'domineering' in that letter. It was for that that I came to apologize. Will you forgive that and the letter altogether, Alice?"

"I will forgive that and everything, Francis."

"My coming to this room now is, I know, against the rule, Alice. Is that forgiven?"

"Quite forgiven, Francis. You may safely leave it to me to make reasonable excuses for you. But if you, being in the wrong, attack me, I cannot again help you."

"Can you help me by relaxing something of your stricter expectations in future, Alice? Mine

is a very difficult position for so sensitive a temper. You know my deep love for you, Alice. You know that I cannot subdue it ; that I would not, if I could."

"The greatest affection, Francis, is quite consistent with patience, and self-denial, and, I will add, trust. Sensitiveness is opposed to all three. But, tell me, what would you have me give way about?"

"You disapprove of my being here so often, Alice."

"No, Francis, not so ! I am always pleased, happy, when you are here. I object only to any *appearance* of your coming here on my account. You are incautious on that point, Francis. You don't know how much I have to guard against. If my father once got hold of the idea that I was accessible to your attentions, he would not rest till he had pushed the question to one or other extreme. I would not leave him, Francis, even for you. I have always told you so. Come when you wish ;—the oftener the better for my pleasure, though I must not express it before others."

"But, Alice, you never allow an opportunity for our meeting or conversing unobserved."

"Nor will I do so now. I object to any mutual understanding except that which is guarded by a spirit of self-denial and patience. I conceded a great deal to your entreaties once, by Robert's persuasion. Our correspondence by letters has hitherto been unreserved. I agreed to it because it had Robert's sanction, and because I saw no contingency of evil in it. How have you used my concession, Francis? By writing me a letter which, with becoming self-respect, I could not have answered at all."

"You have forgiven that, Alice?"

"Yes! and I do forgive it. I am sorry I resented to it after you had expressed your regret. I only meant to show you that an appearance of reserve on my part was the more necessary on account of your want of self-control."

"You are giving your *reasons*, after all, Alice. I understood just now that I was to submit without hearing them."

"You submitted first, Francis. When that is

the case, I wish always to satisfy you that I have not been exacting or inconsiderate."

"I am fully satisfied on that point, Alice. If I have more to say on the subject, I will do so by letter. It is fitting that I should leave you now. I thought of joining George Bentley on the Devi, and remaining here to dinner. Will that be agreeable to your wishes, Alice?"

"Most agreeable! Do so by all means. I saw George sally forth, rod in hand, an hour ago. If you will go and fish between the waterfalls, one or other of us may be able to come down in the course of the day, and refresh you at your labours. Shall we bring you some luncheon about two o'clock?"

"Yes, if you please. I never *do* eat luncheon; but, under your directions, there is no knowing to what I may not be brought."

"Beware of sarcasm, Francis; it is inconsistent with true respect."

"Beware of sensitiveness, Alice; it is inconsistent with trust."

"There! now go, Francis. I should wish you

every success, if I did not commiserate the poor fish that you are going to delude."

Lord Glenarvon wended his way to the "Upper Waterfall," as it was called. It was a walk of more than two miles, through the village of Llandeivi, and onwards up the valley. When he arrived at the fall, George Bentley was fishing in the pool below it, and had already captured several fine trout. * It was arranged that the Earl should walk back about two hundred yards below the fall, and fish from thence all down the valley, so as to reach the park about two o'clock, and that George would follow him at the proper and recognised distance. The uninitiated reader should be informed that the laws of Izaak Walton enjoined that "a sufficient distance be kept between two anglers who are fishing in the same stream for trout, lest they mar each other's sport."

Two o'clock came. Lord Glenarvon and George Bentley had both emerged from the narrow valley of the Devi, and might be seen engaged on the opener stream, where it skirted the Park oppo-

site the west front of the Castle. The Earl sauntered listlessly along, casting his fly at intervals across some tempting eddy, or under the shade of some projecting stone. Ever and anon his face turned landwards, up the sloping green-sward, and towards the Castle.—She comes not yet. Why tarries she, the queen of his soul ; she whom he loves so ardently and yet fears so reverently ? Why does he so adore her ? Because all his visions of beauty, dignity, grace, and loveliness, have centred in her. Why does he so fear her ? Because he knows that her displeasure, her real displeasure, would imply a sentence on himself which he dares not contemplate ; loss of happiness ; loss of all earthly hope ; loss, it may be, of reason, or of life. Thy fear is needless, Lord Earl, couldst thou but know it. None can tell thee the whole truth but she ; and she will never utter it. Others could tell thee of the tender, merciful, heart that struggles so often, and sometimes so successfully, against the lofty imperious spirit. Others could tell thee of the steadfast faith and stainless honour that would

redeem a pledge once given, though redemption were death. But she alone could tell thee of the life that is bound up in thy love ; of the thoughts, and hopes, and prayers that pay daily and hourly homage to the ideal image of thy worth and excellence.

But yet she comes not. The azure ostrich-plume, the sky-blue, gauze-like draperies flutter not in the breeze. But the gate at the north of the terrace is flung open, and, in her stead, a horseman takes his way down the slope of the park. He descries Lord Glenarvon, and points his course to the spot where the Earl is standing. Lord Glenarvon sees his approach and speculates, on this wise.—“It is only one of the grooms, exercising the bay horse that Chesney bought in Warwickshire, or perhaps he is bringing luncheon hither for us anglers. But why does he hurry down that steep incline? The horse is not a Wiltshire horse ; it doesn't know how to slide down a bank on its haunches like some I have seen in the south-down country. To a certainty, there'll be mischief! No! all safe at last. Now

come as fast as you like, my man ; but I wouldn't trust you with a horse of mine."

The groom reaches Lord Glenarvon's side, and hands his lordship a little note, written in pencil and unsealed. While Lord Glenarvon reads, the groom dismounts ; the man is lengthening the stirrup-leathers, and tightening the girths of the horse. Phantasy looks lively and expectant. He knows what that girth-tightening means. It means that there is work for him to do presently. Meanwhile, what does Lord Glenarvon learn from his note ?

"DEAR GLENARVON,—Robert has been attacked by some assassin in Cefn Dingle. He is wounded, and is putting himself in further danger, I fear ; and that without any one near him on whom I can depend. Go to his assistance and keep him out of danger, if you love him or his. You know the spot. Go to it by way of the Cefn. They have sent here for the deerhound. Sophy will meet you with Rollo at the South Lodge. He will follow no one but her or Robert. May heaven protect you all !"

"ALICE."

Reader, I cannot attempt to describe the events that had preceded the delivery of that note nor those which soon followed, without some digressions, nor with the rapidity which would be proper to some passages in that day's history. Lord Glenarvon knew the hill called the Cefn, and he knew the Cefn Dingle full well. It was a wild romantic spot, three miles from Castle Delamare, and on the seacoast. It was while riding through the Cefn Dingle, just six weeks before, by the side of Alice Chesney, that Lord Glenarvon heard the few soft words which told him that his love was not in vain.

Yes; Lord Glenarvon knew the Cefn Dingle well; and if there was one man whom Lord Glenarvon loved more than any other, that man was the brother of Alice Chesney.

Steady nerves, a fearless heart, a face that never showed emotion, were among the gifts of the Earl. He handed his fishing-rod, his basket, and his other angling paraphernalia, with one exception, to the groom; but he put Miss Chesney's note in the pocket of his fly-book, and the fly-

book he kept. Then mounted on Phantasy he rode off, athwart the slopes of the Park, and so leaving the Castle far away to the left. A few minutes brought him to the South Lodge. There were Sophia Bentley, and Alice Chesney, and the deerhound, Rollo. Sophia Bentley was on horseback, on Mr. Verriker's chestnut; Alice was on foot. She had walked thus far to escort Sophia, she was going no further; she would await their return in the Lodge. A few words of inquiry and reply were exchanged. What had happened?

"Robert and Jane Bentley had gone out together on their ponies that morning. They were riding down the Cefn Dingle when some one shot at them. The ball had struck them both, but without doing serious injury to either. They had been joined by Sykes, the gamekeeper, and by Sykes's son, and they were trying to trace the assassin. They had got his rifle, but he was armed also with pistols. They had sent Sykes's boy to the Castle on one of the ponies, for the deerhound. Her control over the hound, as well

as her anxiety about her sister, obliged Sophia to go with Lord Glenarvon." Such was the substance of Alice Chesney's explanation.

"Robert's pistols are in the holsters, fastened to Sophia's saddle. They are loaded. Do not stop to change them to the other saddle, Glenarvon. Now go! Sophy, you know Merlin's Stone on the top of the Cefn. Make first for that, dear!"

Such were the parting words of Alice Chesney. In ten minutes' time, a motley group had assembled round Merlin's Stone on the summit of the Cefn. We will enumerate its components, beginning with the quadrupeds.

There are two ponies, Robert Chesney's and Jane's. They are tethered together on the heath, and are contentedly browsing the short grass of the moorland.

Phantasy and Verity are in charge of Sykes's boy, who had returned to the spot before Lord Glenarvon reached it. The flanks of Phantasy and Verity (such was the name which had been given to the chestnut) are still heaving. They

have had a smart gallop, but they have not turned a hair. And Rollo, too; the pace has told on him. His tongue lolls from his mouth; his breath comes quick as he gazes southwards across the waste. He has twice snuffed the track of the fugitive, where the miscreant must have passed round the edge of Merlin's Stone, and twice has the deep bay of the bloodhound been echoed back by the Cefn Dingle beneath. Rollo waits but the word of command, and he will dash onward on the path, which he has already selected.

And there is Sykes, the gamekeeper, an old man, with an honest, weather-beaten face. His double-barrelled gun is laid on one side, against Merlin's Stone. He is examining a rifle, recently discharged. It is a modern rifle, of French manufacture; the maker's name is French. It is, of course, the rifle lately used by the assassin. A deadly weapon, doubtless, if placed in skilful hands. So thought Martin Sykes, as his eyes turned away from the rifle, and dwelt with devotion on the tall form of Robert Chesney.

And there is Jane Bentley, seated on a ledge

of the rock, while Sophy kneels before her, gazing lovingly into her face. Jane is calm and collected. She has not been alarmed at all on her own account, nor is she hurt much. Sophy has ascertained all about the injury sustained by Jane. The rifle-ball had cut Jane's riding-habit clean across the back, and had passed out through the left sleeve without touching the arm. Her chemisette, so Sophy said, was also cut across, as with a knife. Had Jane been wearing an evening dress, you might have seen a horizontal streak of red, crossing either shoulder just above the said dress;—two scratches, or abrasions, which had hardly bled at all. So Sophy was comforted.

And Robert Chesney; he is under examination by Lord Glenarvon. The injury he has sustained would seem to be serious, judging from the blood with which the front of his shirt and his nankeen waistcoat are saturated. Still he is not materially hurt. There is a deep gash across his chest, grazing, probably, on the bone, but it has ceased bleeding.

Before we pursue Richard Pugh, for he had

been identified as the assassin by Robert Chesney, we must tell the reader what had happened previously in the adjacent Dingle, and we must describe the locality.

The Cefn Dingle was a wild romantic gorge, on either side of which the adjacent banks towered more or less precipitously. These banks were overgrown in some places to about half their height with thick brushwood ; and in other places, the grey rock of the district peeping out, or standing boldly forth from the copse, diversified the scene. Above copse and rock the hills, clad with short turf, or heath, or gorse, rose skyward on either side. Down the centre of the dingle tumbled a little brook, sparkling where it caught the sunlight, and elsewhere talkative and joyous. If you entered the dingle at its top, the rough road, which took you through it, kept to the left of, and parallel with, the brook ; but the road was at least thirty yards above the level of the brook, running, that is, across the slope, and round the projections of the left-hand bank. It was to the right of the brook that the bank

towered up above the copse to the greatest height, forming, in fact, the hill called the Cefn, at the top of which was Merlin's Stone.

Robert Chesney and Jane Bentley had that morning entered the Cefn Dingle at the top. The road was wide enough for their ponies to walk abreast. They had been there before. They came to-day, partly because it was a pretty scene, partly because Robert Chesney had appointed Sykes, the keeper, to meet him, at half-past twelve, at a spot about a mile below the Dingle, where it was proposed to make a reservoir or fishpond. They had advanced halfway down the gorge, and had just rounded a jutting rock, so that Robert Chesney, whose pony was on the right hand, was thrown a little behind. He was pressing his pony onward, so as to come up abreast of Jane's, and was nearly in rank, when both riders and ponies were startled, the former by the strokes of a bullet which whizzed between them, and the latter by the near report of a gun. Jane, who naturally was the least likely to have known what had happened, knew, nevertheless ;

knew that they had been shot at, and that she was struck, but not hurt. A glance at Robert Chesney showed her that he had been struck also. His hand was on his breast, and he had not yet recovered from the sudden shock. He soon did recover, and both were looking across the Dingle to a thicket of brushwood, out of which curled the smoke of the discharged gun. A figure, gun in hand, broke from the thicket, and began to scale the opposite bank, tending upwards towards the Cefn. Jane's eyes were bent on this figure ; and, before she could look round or utter a word of caution, the bridle of Robert Chesney's pony had been thrown across the pommel of her saddle, and Robert Chesney, having dismounted, was halfway through the brushwood below. Then, for a few moments, Robert Chesney was invisible : she could only hear the noise below as he made his passage through the brushwood. Jane Bentley knew that he had gone in pursuit of the assassin ; an unarmed man in pursuit of an armed ruffian. In all the agony of the succeeding minutes, Jane Bentley never lost a point or a

turn in the desperate game which she knew was playing. Let us record all that she observed, and all that actually happened.

The assassin, steady and cat-like, is still scaling the opposite bank. He still carries his rifle, and ever as he scrambles, he looks back on the gorge below.

And now Robert Chesney has emerged from the brook and from the dark ravine. Robert Chesney is mounting the opposite bank; he has reached the thicket whence the villain fired at him, but the fugitive is now fifty yards above Robert Chesney's head.

It is a race of life and death. "God grant that the pursuer may fail to overtake that miscreant!" But the pursuer is gaining ground. "Robert Chesney; my life, my all—! oh, why have I lived to see —?"

Jane Bentley has stilled her wild-beating heart; with a strong effort she has curbed her incoherent utterances. She is watching and praying. What else can she do, when none are near to help her or to hear her?

"Oh, mercy! Robert Chesney is following exactly where the assassin leads him. He is tracking him through the bushes! he gains upon him fast! Would that Robert Chesney were still lying on his bed at Gossett Grange. Is it for this that I have nursed him so long?"

And, indeed, the odds were getting fearful; so fast did Robert Chesney gain upon the quarry. At length the fugitive breaks from the brushwood; close behind him he hears the pursuer crashing through the brakes, but sobbing with exhausted breath. The fugitive has missed, in his haste, a path which he had calculated on finding; his onward road is barred by the face of a perpendicular rock. Will he turn to bay there? He has thrown down his rifle, and drawn a pistol from his belt. Still his resolution fails him. He will try flight once more. He skirts the precipice; he turns its outer angle; he stands on its top just as Robert Chesney reaches its base. Robert Chesney halts not five yards below and looks upward.

"Ha! Richard Pugh! so I thought."

The answer was a bullet, which whizzed over Robert Chesney's head. A curse followed; the cap of another pistol exploded, but the weapon itself missed fire. Another curse: a further flight; a still exacting pursuit, followed. But the fugitive, unencumbered by his rifle, and having found a well-known track, has now the advantage in speed. When Robert Chesney breaks out of the upper brushwood, and finds himself on the lower steep of the Cefn, he looks around and upwards. Richard Pugh has vanished! There is nothing before Robert Chesney but the bare hill-side, and Merlin's Stone on its summit.

What is Jane Bentley doing meantime? She is watching and praying. She sees it all; she notes the pistol-shot, how it missed its mark; she notes how the second pistol misses fire. But then the combatants, when they move upward, beyond the rock, are out of her sight. Only for a moment! Robert Chesney's pony is cast loose, and Jane Bentley rides back up the lane, so as to keep level with the skirmishers on the opposite bank, and to mark their movements.

Thus Jane Bentley saw what Robert Chesney was too late to see. She saw the fugitive leave the cover of the copse-wood and run rapidly up the side of the Cefn. She saw him turn the base of Merlin's Stone and bear away to the south. She saw that he had escaped, and she was thankful.

Jane Bentley hesitated not a moment as to what she was to do next. Her white pony is urged to his utmost speed. He goes clattering on up the self-same lane : he leaves the ravine, and passes on into the open moorland. He is then guided to the left, and leaps the little brook where it has not yet begun its downward and steeper course through the Cefn Dingle. In short, Jane Bentley has turned the head of the Cefn Dingle, and is galloping down the other side of the ravine to the spot where she has calculated that Robert Chesney would leave the copse for the open moorland, or where he would be soon about to leave it.

Jane Bentley's calculation was very exact. Before Robert Chesney, emerging from the Dingle,

had finished his survey of the Cefn Hill, Jane Bentley pulled up her pony beside him.

"It is Richard Pugh, Jane! He has escaped. Have you an idea which way he went?"

"Up here, Sir. I saw him go round Merlin's Stone. I don't think that he stayed there. I think he went onward in that direction," (pointing toward the south).

"Let us see, Jane."

The two went onward. They came to Merlin's Stone. They passed around it. It could conceal nothing. All the moorland beyond was open, bare, and destitute of any moving object.

Robert Chesney sat down on the edge of Merlin's Stone, now first discovering that he was breathless, exhausted, and bleeding profusely.

"Yes, the fellow has escaped; that is certain. Why, Jane, you are as good in the field as at the council-board, or as at the bedside of a cripple. How came you here, Jane?"

"We came round the top of the Dingle, Sir. Little Snow and I soon arranged that. Mercy! Robert Chesney, what do I see? You are hurt!

You are bleeding dreadfully ! Tell me that you are not much hurt, Sir."

"Robert Chesney is not at all hurt, Ma'am. When some one calls him 'Robert Chesney,' he feels quite himself. Don't call him 'Sir,' if you please, Ma'am. It might bring back the worst symptoms."

"Idle to speak in that way, Mr. Chesney, after such an escape. But, oh ! is it really an escape ? Are you unhurt, Mr. Chesney ? Tell me the truth."

"Robert Chesney will tell you the truth when you ask him, Jane. He doesn't answer questions which are addressed to imaginary beings, under inappropriate titles."

"Then you shall be Robert Chesney for the present. But only answer me, wilful man ; are you hurt ? Why is all that blood ? Do not keep me in suspense, if you have it in your power to reassure me."

"Dear Jane, I meant to reassure you by talking lightly. I am in earnest now, dear Jane. I am not hurt in any way to cause anxiety. The ball

from that first shot just grazed me across here ; that is all. The wonder is, dear Jane, that it did not strike you. We were so near together at the moment."

"I think I just felt it pass behind me, Sir. I heard it, at all events, as it whizzed by."

"*Sir !* again, Jane ! I feel that worse than the bullet. However, you must be good, and try to learn better manners. Now, let us consider what is to be done next, Jane. My pony is on the other side of the Dingle, I presume !"

"Yes, Sir (Mr. Chesney I mean) ; and he is loose. I had not time to tie him up."

"Will you ride back to where you left the pony, Jane ? I will cross the Dingle again, and meet you. Let us see which can get there first ?"

"Very well, Mr. Chesney. But you have not got that man's gun. Do you know that he threw it away at the foot of the rock ;—the rock where he drew his pistols ! You should look for the gun, as you go under the rock."

"Very good, dear Jane ! I am glad you told me about it."

Robert Chesney and Jane Bentley now parted. In due course they met again, in the Dingle Road, at the spot where they had first separated. Robert Chesney was a little the earliest at the rendezvous. When Jane arrived, she saw that he had not only secured Richard Pugh's gun, but had recaptured the loose pony. Poor Jane sighed to think how fast Robert Chesney was escaping from the thralldom of her care.

"See, Jane, how well I can move about when it is not convenient to be petted. Now, Jane, I want you to stay here, and take care of this rifle, till I return with old Martin. It is half-past twelve, and I know where to find him. We shall be here again in less than half-an-hour."

Robert Chesney rode on down the Dingle, and within the promised time he returned to Jane Bentley, accompanied by Martin Sykes and Martin Sykes's son. He then dismounted; tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and making a desk of his pony's saddle, wrote a note to Alice Chesney, giving her the information which, as we have seen, she forthwith communicated to Lord Glen-

arvon. Robert Chesney had asked his sister merely to send Rollo to the Cefn, but in this, as in most things, Alice Chesney acted on her own judgment, and sent not only Rollo, but Lord Glenarvon and Sophia Bentley.

Robert Chesney, when he had written the note in question, did not at once despatch it. He seemed hesitating as to what to do. He thought of asking Jane Bentley to go to the Castle with the note, but he gave up that idea for some reason which I will not endeavour to explain. At length he put the note in his pocket, and leading his pony, walked up the Dingle, conversing with old Martin Sykes. Jane Bentley and Sykes junior followed at a little distance. Then Jane Bentley took the opportunity of dismounting from her pony, and requesting Sykes junior to look at the back of her riding-habit and report his observations. She might have employed a less outspoken and a less astute inspector of her predicament. Jerry Sykes had gathered much of the late catastrophe from "young Sir Robert's" talk to his father; and now he had little difficulty in explain-

ing to Jane Bentley that the ball which had struck "young Sir Robert" had struck her also. In fact, Jerry peeped through the rent habit, and saw that the linen beneath was somewhat stained with blood.

When Robert Chesney reached the head of the Cefn Dingle, he gave up his pony to Jerry Sykes, and despatched that youth to the Castle. Jerry of course took the note which Robert Chesney had written, but he also took the more apocryphal and verbal intelligence that Miss Bentley was hurt.

As Jerry passed northwards towards the Castle, Robert Chesney and his two companions (Martin Sykes and Jane Bentley) turned the head of the Dingle, and went southwards over the Cefn till they came to Merlin's Stone. It was not till Lord Glenarvon and Sophia Bentley arrived at Merlin's Stone that Robert Chesney discovered the fact of Jane Bentley's injury. Robert Chesney was an observant man, a very observant man. He had not discovered that Jane Bentley was hurt, I say. How should he, when she so carefully concealed

the matter ? He discovered afterwards, however, that her conduct that day had brought a conviction to his own mind which no ulterior circumstances could ever shake ;—a conviction that he never was to look upon another woman as comparable with her.

To resume the main thread of our story. When those who were assembled round Merlin's Stone had exchanged all the intelligence necessary to each, Robert Chesney walked up to Jane and Sophia, and arranged with them that they should remain where they were, or go to Sykes's cottage if they preferred it. The boy Sykes was to attend them and take charge of the horses. It was no time for Jane Bentley to express a feeling or an opinion of any kind. Her condition seemed to be one of torpid acquiescence, till Robert Chesney left her. It was then that Sophia Bentley first learnt it for a certainty that her sister's life was bound up in her love for Robert Chesney. But to continue.—

Robert Chesney now removed the pistols from Verity's saddle and transferred them to his own

pony, which he mounted. Lord Glenarvon and Martin Sykes attended him on foot, the latter carrying his double-barrelled gun. Rollo was put on the quest of the fugitive, and soon took a southward course, a little to the right of the crest of the hill. It was clear that Pugh had taken the line which would best shelter him from the observation of any one standing on the opposite hill, the hill to the left of the Dingle. One mile, nearly two miles, along the mountain-ridge ; Robert Chesney's pony on the half-trot, Lord Glenarvon and Sykes easily keeping pace with the pony ; the blood-hound well in hand, but never hesitating for a moment as to his course ; only proclaiming at intervals, with a long full cry, the marvel of his unerring instinct !

Another half-mile will bring the party to the edge of a cliff which overhangs the sea-coast. They pass a heap of great stones. Robert Chesney knows that it is the land-mark which indicates the boundary of the Delamare estate. Martin Sykes now announces his conviction that Pugh had betaken himself to the Boggy's Hole.

The old man points upward to a chasm which opens in the landward face of the "Bogy's cliff." The blood-hound registers the old man's opinion by dashing straight up the ascent. But, when within ten yards of the cave's mouth, the hound hears and accepts the signal of recal and crouches at his master's feet. Robert Chesney has halted and dismounted. The three pursuers are holding a conference. Robert Chesney gathers from Sykes the little, the very little, which the latter knew of the "Bogy's Hole." It was a cave, and was believed by the people of the neighbourhood to be haunted by a "bwg," or evil spirit. No one professed a knowledge of the size or extent of the cave; no one, so far as Martin Sykes knew, had ever entered it. He did not think that there was a man in the country who would venture inside it, or near it; except perhaps himself; for his parents had been English folks and had not brought him up to believe in anything more dangerous than a poacher.

Robert Chesney tethered his pony at the foot

of the hill, handed a pistol to Lord Glenarvon, took another pistol himself, and led the way to the cave. Lord Glenarvon followed close at his heels. Sykes and the deer-hound brought up the rear. They were not long to be left in much doubt as to the real nature of the present situation or the real inhabitants of the Bogy's Hole. Ten strides would have brought Robert Chesney within the mouth of the chasm, when a voice from the interior called him by name and ordered him to stand. At the same moment Richard Pugh came out boldly into the entrance, a pistol in each hand, double-barrelled pistols, both cocked. Over Pugh's shoulder appeared the face of another man. The deer-hound sprang forward, unbidden, with a yell. Pugh lowered one of his pistols to a level with the dog. Robert Chesney's voice was raised just in time to save the dog's life by an emphatic rebuke. The dog retreated and crouched down. Had the dog died that moment, Richard Pugh had unquestionably died the next, for Martin Sykes stood with his gun steadily pointed at

Pugh's head ; and Martin Sykes was not a man given to empty demonstrations.

At this crisis, when the first shot fired must have resulted in an instant scene of deadly carnage, Pugh adroitly seized the moment of suspense, and turned it to his own advantage.

"Here be four lives," he said, still holding out his pistols, "and there be four more behind. Now take your choice, Robert Chesney. Stay where you are, or pass that place and die."

The place, indicated by Pugh, was the spot on which he himself was standing, in the mouth of the cave. As he uttered his threat he dug his heel violently into the ground, and, turning round, vanished within the cave. Robert Chesney was advancing on Pugh already, looking Pugh full in the face, but not raising his own pistol. Pugh's threat had hardly left his lips when Robert Chesney challenged the threatened danger by passing over the spot where he was "to die." He was in darkness, but he knew that Pugh was not three paces ahead of him. He made a spring forward and with his extended

hand felt and clutched what he took to be Pugh's collar. It was only the up-turned rim of Pugh's hat. The hat remained in Robert Chesney's hand, but at the same moment his own head came violently in contact with the roof of the cave and he fell headlong. A pistol-shot now rung through the cave. The flash pointed backwards, and showed Lord Glenarvon as he stumbled over Robert Chesney, that Pugh was now many paces ahead, and was stooping down ; for the cave was too low to admit of a man's walking upright any further. Pugh's shot was harmless. Probably it was fired at random or with a view to retard the pursuit. Lord Glenarvon, somewhat rashly, fired in reply, with what effect he could not tell. He was a good pistol-shot ; but the best pistol-shot would probably miss his mark at ten paces, if he were blind-folded by darkness, and if his footing at the moment were not quite steady. However, the flash of Lord Glenarvon's pistol showed the retreating figure of Pugh once more, and precisely in the line which the Earl had calculated.

All was darkness again ; but Robert Chesney was once more on his feet, groping steadily along the cavern, and in advance of Lord Glenarvon. Their progress was perforce slow, and at length Robert Chesney announced that the cave had come to "a dead end;" they must have inadvertently passed some turning. They, all three, searched back, right and left, for such a turning. Martin Sykes exclaimed, "Try the dog, Sir Robert."

"Hie ! forward, good dog ! Steady now !" said Robert Chesney, and the cave re-echoed to the deep-mouthed bay of the hound. But no ; the experiment is vain ! The dog's note changes suddenly. It is no longer the jubilant music of well-informed sense ; it sinks to the complaining babble of questing uncertainty ; it dies away altogether. Rollo has given up the game. Robert Chesney feels the cold nose of the dog pressed against the back of his hand.—"Try again, good dog !" No ! Rollo declines !

Martin Sykes happens, like most gamekeepers, to be a smoker of tobacco. He has some matches

about him ; and one match after another is ignited, as the party pursues to the last its investigation of the Bogy's Hole. It is to no purpose. The last match has been used, and they, all three, are standing again outside the cave on the open hill-side.

"Could there be a trap-door in the floor of the cave?" suggested Lord Glenarvon.

"No," replied Robert Chesney, "I think not. The dog would have indicated such a means of exit, had Pugh used it. Nevertheless, we must leave nothing untried. Martin, where is the nearest place at which one could procure candles and more matches?"

Martin Sykes pondered a moment and replied—

"At Maggie Jones's, Sir Robert. If I may take the pony I could be there and back in less than half an hour."

"Where is Maggie Jones's, Martin?"

"Under the Lighthouse cliff, Sir Robert; a good mile up the beach.—And a rough road along the shingles, Sir Robert."

"Go there at once," said Robert Chesney.

"Let us have as many candles as Maggie can let us have for this" (handing some silver to the keeper).

Martin Sykes mounted at once, and trotted off, taking a road which, after rounding the western or right-hand side of the Bogy's Cliff, sloped down gradually to the shore. Martin had not been gone five minutes, when he reappeared. He was coming back to Robert Chesney at full gallop. He rode up to his master, and, as he dismounted from the pony, told Robert Chesney that it was "all over," that "Dick Pugh" and his companion had escaped. Martin then tethered the pony, and, beckoning Robert Chesney and Lord Glenarvon to follow him, took his way up the landward face of the Bogy's Cliff. "If we make haste we shall be in time to see the last of Dick Pugh, Sir Robert."

They did make haste, and when they reached the top of the slope, Martin Sykes halted and pointed significantly seawards. About a mile from land, and making slow way against the incoming tide, was a small boat. It was rowed

by two men, and one of them was without a hat. It was evident at once to all three spectators that those two men were Richard Pugh and his accomplice. To make the matter plainer still, as soon as Robert Chesney and his two companions had made this observation, the smart ring of a pistol-shot sounded from the sea, and you saw that the fugitives had fired a mock salute when they caught sight of their baffled pursuers.

The misadventure was complete. The boat was nearing a light craft which, with sails set, was beating about in the offing. The two men were seen to get on board the lugger; their boat was moored astern; and the lugger, crowding all sail, stood away to the south-west. Instead of watching her, Robert Chesney and his party found the speediest way down to the beach, and began to examine the seaward side of the Bogy's Cliff. They were walking along its base, when the deerhound, who was slightly in advance, suddenly gave tongue, and dashed off, baying joyously, towards the water-edge.

Robert Chesney rushed to the spot whence the hound had started on his quest. Robert Chesney expected to see a chasm in the rock, but, instead of that, a rope-ladder hung dangling before his eyes. Twenty yards over his head, and in the very face of the cliff, there was indeed a small chasm, from which the rope-ladder depended. The remaining question was, how Richard Pugh had passed from the Bogy's Hole to that chasm. That question was solved by torch-light on the following Monday.—

Where the Bogy's Cave came, as Robert Chesney thought, to a 'dead end,' it was considerably higher than in any other part; and in its roof was a hole large enough to admit a man. This hole landed the climber into the bottom of a second gallery or cave, which gallery emerged in the seaward face of the cliff. The ascent from the lower to the upper cave was by another rope-ladder about seven feet in length, which appeared to be a fixture; only that when Pugh had last ascended it, he had drawn it up after him and left it stretched on the floor of the

upper cave. It will be quite clear how such a contrivance was beyond the Bloodhound's powers of detection.

The Bogy's Cave, when closely examined, afforded ample evidence of its having been the resort of smugglers, whose interest it of course was to propagate such stories about its demoniacal character as would best serve to keep the curious at a distance from its precincts. All that remained, then, to Robert Chesney from his pursuit of Richard Pugh was a severe wound, a few yards of rope-ladder, some relics of the carousals of a past generation of smugglers, and an old hat, without a name in it. Such was the summing-up of Miss Sophia Bentley, some days afterwards, when her spirits allowed her to speak in a congratulatory tone on the events of the twenty-sixth of April.

CHAPTER IV.

IF Edmund Bentley, on one occasion, deemed that his sister Sophia had acted with insufficient forethought, it is certain that want of consideration for others was not, as a general rule, one of her failings. As soon as Robert Chesney and his party had vanished from the sight of the two sisters, who sat side by side on Merlin's Stone, Sophia began to reflect within herself that Jane had had no refreshment all that anxious day, and that Alice Chesney was waiting at the South Lodge for news, which perhaps might not reach her for hours. Sophia determined to write a note to Alice Chesney and to send it by Jerry Sykes. But, alas! with all her ingenuity, she

could not invent the writing materials which neither she nor Jane had about them. A verbal message entrusted to Jerry Sykes must be her resource ; and Sophia made it as short as possible, leaving it to Jerry to relate all that he had seen and heard in common with herself.

“ Ask Miss Chesney to bring Miss Jane some luncheon, to Merlin’s Stone, and if she cannot come, to send it by you.” That was Sophia’s message.

Jerry seated himself composedly on the side-saddle of Jane Bentley’s pony, and galloped off to the South Lodge. He found Miss Chesney there, and delivered the message in a way which showed that he understood its purport, without remembering the exact words :—

“ Please, my Lady, the one Miss Bentley says as you be to send t’other Miss Bentley summut to eat, and some drink, and you be to take it yoursel’.”

“ Very well, Jerry ; then let me have the pony, and follow me to the Castle as quick as you can.”

Alice Chesney rode into the stable-yard of the Castle. She was afraid of encountering her father, who was hitherto in happy ignorance of her anxieties. She hung up the pony at the stable-door, and ordered her own pony to be saddled also. She went to Mrs. Hughes's room, and told her of the existing trouble. She asked Mrs. Hughes to get hold of Mr. George Bentley and explain matters to him, so that he might be able to pacify Sir Robert, in case the latter became alarmed at the prolonged absence of the rest of the family. She got some sandwiches and a flask of wine for Jane, and finally she ordered a room to be got ready for Lord Glenarvon, in case his lordship should incline to stay all night. Then, without waiting to don her riding-habit, Alice Chesney in her blue muslin dress rode off to Merlin's Stone, followed by Jerry, who resumed his seat on Jane's side-saddle and on Snow.

It was a glad sight for Sophia Bentley, when she discerned Alice Chesney's approach; for Jane, usually so composed, so patient, and so hopeful, was not only depressed and despondent,

but actually hysterical. Let us pass the two hours which next transpired, while those three women, so entirely different in themselves, sat together at the base of Merlin's Stone and were in spiritual unison. I cannot tell you what they said, reader. It has never been given to me even to guess how three women, circumstanced as they were, would converse. All I know is that Jane Bentley sat between her sister and Alice Chesney for two long hours, and that the arm of each of Jane Bentley's assessors was encircling her all the time.

Women understand each other ! so it is said ; and I believe it. Men understand each other ! So it is said in rather a different sense ; and even in that sense, I don't believe it. But when you tell me that men understand women, such women as are worth understanding ; my dear young friend, I must answer candidly that I account you as altogether an impostor. Pass on, my dear young friend ! go to school again ; or else cultivate your whiskers, or your beard, or your moustache a little more, and then, in ten years

time, let the world know what you think about the women whom you have meantime deemed worth considering. My friend, I guess that you will not understand and worship them then, as you think that you understand and worship them now.

Two hours ! Three women, sitting on Merlin's Stone ! They have comforted each other, those three women, without feeling the wane of comfort or the wane of time. At length the conversation halts ; and becomes forced. Two, at least, of the three are smothering a suspense which is no longer endurable. Sophia Bentley ! How is it that Sophia Bentley, so gay and thoughtless and inconsiderate, as our young whiskered friend might deem her, takes the lead on this occasion and proposes ?—

“Alice, dear ! let us mount and ride ; let us pursue these pursuers ; let us call them to account for their behaviour in leaving us here so long.”

“Sophy,” said Jane, “we were asked to remain here ; and we ought to do so. Surely when others are perhaps in danger, we ought to be patient.”

"Yes, Jane! I am going to be patient, very patient; so is Alice; but not patient, Jane, if I find you in wilful rebellion. Please to mount that white pony, Jane; and think of who gave him to you; and of other associations, Jane, that belong to that white pony. Come, Jane! Up and away!"

"Sophy, Sophy! you are so thoughtless. I think, if Alice approves, that we shall not be doing wrong if we ride a little way and take care to keep in sight of Merlin's Stone."

"Very well, Jane! let us do so! and suppose we start in that direction, Alice," said Sophia, pointing to a distant hill, quite in the opposite direction to that in which the chase had gone.

"No! no!" said Alice Chesney. "Follow me, Sophy. I will show you such a pretty moss, which grows nowhere but in a hollow of the Cefn. There! Sophy! about a mile in that direction, and then we shall turn a little to the right."

"But, we must not lose sight of Merlin's Stone, Alice," said Sophia, as she attempted to follow Miss Chesney's example, and to mount her

steed. Her steed, be it remembered, was not a Welsh pony, but the Warwickshire hunter, Verity. Verity rather objected to being mounted in that off-hand way, by Sophia Bentley. There was a laying down of Verity's ears and a wicked stare about his eye, which meant delay, if not mischief, when Sophia essayed to put her foot into the stirrup. Jerry Sykes proffered an ill-instructed aid on behalf of Sophia Bentley, and the result would have been open rebellion on the part of Verity, had not Jane come to the rescue.

"There, Sophy! how silly you are! laughing and talking while you mount, and at the same time expecting that Verity will be less excited and wilful than yourself. He has not been used to carry ladies; certainly not such noisy ladies as you, Sophy. There, now! leave him to me, dear! Please do, Sophy, and don't try to frighten me. You shall ride Snow."

"Well, Jane; don't be cross. I will do everything you ask me, and I see that you will manage Verity better than I can. I will not get on Snow,

Jane, till you are mounted on Verity, else my starting will excite Verity more."

"That is a very sensible idea, Sophy. Now, will you lead Snow under Verity's nose? And Jerry, stand on the other side of Verity, and stroke his neck; but don't touch his bridle, Jerry. I will manage the bridle."

In the next moment the chestnut seemed to know that his reluctant feelings, about being mounted by a lady without a fuss, had been sufficiently respected. He acquiesced in Jane Bentley's first effort to mount him, and thenceforth he and she were on the best of terms. He was steered off in the wake of Alice Chesney, and Sophia followed on the back of Snow. They went along the crest of the Cefn southward; we will suppose to look for that "pretty moss."

But, no; the three equestrians do not turn to the right. They seem to have forgotten the vicinity of that "pretty moss." They pass far beyond the place of its *habitat*; straight on, to the utmost point which Robert Chesney and his companions, as watched from Merlin's Stone, had

reached two hours before. There they halt, and begin to converse.

"Do you know this mountain, Alice?" said Sophia; "I have no idea where we are."

"I know it very well, dear! That heap of stones is the boundary of Father's Land. The castle is behind us, in that direction, but the high ground above the Devi hides it from our view. Beyond, in front of us, is the Bogy's Cliff, and there to the right of that Cliff is the Light-house Cliff. Under those cliffs is the sea."

"I should like to have a peep at the sea, Alice. May we not ride on a little further to the edge of the cliff?" said Sophia.

"Alice, do not go any further," said Jane Bentley. "We were told to remain by Merlin's Stone; and now we are nearly out of sight of Merlin's Stone."

"I, individually, am not under orders at present, Jane. Besides, do you think it necessary to be so very obedient to what men enjoin, Jane?" said Alice.

"When they are in danger, Alice, surely we

ought to think of what they wish, especially if we—, if we respect their judgment,” said Jane.

“To respect a man’s judgment, and to respect his wishes, are two very different things, Jane. If I bow to the one, I generally choose to oppose the other,” said Alice.

“Of course,” said Sophy ; “and if we don’t keep the distinction up between the two, men will soon manage to confound them. They will talk of respect and obedience, while they mean only to enforce slavery. It is mere affectation, Jane, talking in that way. She may, and does, think very much of the wishes of others ; but as to respecting any one’s judgment but her own, the dear prosy old thing never imagined it.”

“Sophy, dear !” said Alice, “I must defend Jane. When she used the words ‘respect their judgment’ just now, it was only an inadvertency. She was going to say something else, which she felt to be more imperative on her allegiance than a man’s judgment ; but she repented of the sentiment which she did mean, and replaced it with another sentiment which she did not mean. The

exchange was quite pardonable under the circumstances, Sophy."

"Tell me, Alice, what was dear Jane going to say when she turned it off into the words 'respect their judgment?'"

"She was going to say 'love them,' Sophy. Did you not observe it?"

"Love them! Love men! Do you really mean to say that such an idea ever entered Jane's mind? or that, if it did, she was ever on the point of uttering it, Alice?"

"Indeed, I think that she was very near it, Sophy."

"Alice! do you know, I have often wondered what dear Jane's notion about loving was? Of course we know that she loves you, and me, and all of us, in her own dear, unalterable, way. But, suppose I were a man, Alice, and suppose I fell in love with dear Jane, the first day I saw her (which I should be sure to do), and suppose I went down on my knees and told her all about it, what *do* you think she would say in reply, Alice?"

“It would depend, Sophy, on whether she loved your manship or not. If her sentiments towards you were something just short of utter dislike, you would have the best chance. She would probably accept you out of gratitude, and a sense of duty to one who had felt kindly towards her.”

“But if she loved me very much, Alice?”

“Oh! then I think she would probably refuse you, from motives of self-denial, and of excessive anxiety for your welfare.”

“That is Jane to the life,” said Sophia, clapping her hands with ecstasy. “Now, Alice, we won’t tease dear Jane any more to-day. Nothing is better for her than a little teasing, when judiciously administered; and you can’t think, Alice, how dear Jane takes a liking to any one who will tease her now and then. I am going to pet Jane now. But what or whom is she watching so intently? Jane, dear, what do you see?”

“I think I see Mr. Chesney’s pony grazing on the side of the hill yonder. Alice, you will see it if you stand in your stirrup,” said Jane Bentley.

"Yes, I see it," said Alice Chesney. "It is Robert's pony. Let us ride on."

The fact was that the three girls had ridden to within half a mile of the Bogy's Cliff, and had halted where a slight inequality of the ground shut the tethered pony from the sight of two of them. Jane Bentley, being mounted on a tall horse, first caught sight of the pony, and had been watching it, while Alice and Sophy had been amusing themselves at her expense. This was at the particular time when Robert Chesney and his two companions were examining the seaward base of the cliff.

Alice Chesney, followed by Sophy and Jane, now rode forward to the place where Robert Chesney's pony was tethered. They had hardly time to speculate on the import of that phenomenon, when Rollo came bounding up to Sophy, and, unceremoniously placing his fore-paws on Snow's withers, pleaded for the wonted caress. In a minute more, voices were heard, and the three baffled pursuers of Richard Pugh joined the group of females, and gave a full

account of all that had happened. 'Richard Pugh had escaped. The vessel in which he had gone had taken a middle course, which left it undecided whether she was bound for Cornwall or for the south of Ireland. She was still in sight from the cliff, but pursuit by sea was out of the question.'

The whole party now filed off in pairs and took their way to Merlin's Stone. First rode Robert Chesney and Jane Bentley; then came Sophia, with Martin Sykes striding along on her right and giving her more exact information as to Pugh's escape, while Rollo trotted along on her left. Last, and indeed very far in the rear, walked Lord Glenarvon, with his hand resting on the mane of Alice Chesney's pony.

"This has been an eventful day, Alice; and, looking only at the surface of things, I suppose we may congratulate each other on the results."

"What do you see below the surface, Francis? Nothing that we need fear, I trust."

"I don't hold Robert Chesney's life to be safe as long as that Pugh is at liberty. He can have

come here for no other purpose but murder. His scheme was well laid. He must have some correspondent in the neighbourhood. The question is whether he will attempt the thing again? Who knows but that he may be back this very night? Steps should have been taken to have the vessel followed; at whatever distance of time."

"Have you pressed that upon Robert?"

"Indeed I have, most urgently, but in vain. I do not understand your brother. His careless demeanour gives me as much apprehension as his possible danger."

"Do you think him altered then?"

"Very unaccountably altered. He was always cool and fearless in moments of danger. But this reckless staking of life, for no appreciable object, is a new thing to him. Already he shows no mortification at Pugh's escape. To-morrow he will have forgotten that such a person exists. And the fellow's dogged malevolence is just as mysterious to me as Robert Chesney's apathy."

"As regards Robert, I fear it is as you say.

He is altered ; altered in many ways, and I cannot understand the change. Does he seem to confide in you as much as formerly, Francis ?”

“I have no reason to complain of any change in his affection. But his feelings on all subjects seem to be dormant. This time last year we were travelling together, you know, in Greece. Well ! I should have then said that no man respected his own antecedents or loved and enjoyed his life and prospects more than Robert Chesney, or for better reasons.”

“It is very sad. If I attempted to account for the change, my utmost guess would but touch what I deem a very partial, very inadequate cause. My father,—all of us, have but one wish about him. It is his own wish too ; and yet ;—and yet, I doubt its ever being realized.”

“I can’t avoid taking your meaning, Alice. But Robert Chesney is the last man that would give way under mere disappointment of any kind, unless it were caused by his own error. He is peculiar in that ;—quite different to any man I ever met with. A defeated hope, that

would be enough to crush me, would scarcely ruffle his temper for a day."

"I don't quite agree in that, Francis. My brother, if he is what he was, is always willing to qualify, but not to surrender, his objects. I mean that he is thankful to accept something a little short of, or a little different from, his calculated hope. You, I suspect, are inclined to insist on the very exactest fulfilment of a wish or project; and, if you don't realize that, you feel unduly mortified."

"I have heard that lesson once before to-day, Alice. I shall learn it soon. I did not mean to introduce myself into the present subject. But, as we have begun to be personal, let me ask you if there are not often ways of attaining the one definite object without tampering with its essence? For instance, one may alter one's tactics, one's method of striving."

"Possibly; and, by so proceeding, may attain in the end a fuller and more real object than your imagination had suggested. In such a case, however, it is very important to know from

the first what your exact object really is. If it is only your own will, it will be liable to variation, and perhaps to disappointment."

"But if it is *your* love, Alice?"

"Then you will obtain the more of it, Francis, in proportion as you give up your own will. I know it is a hard struggle for you, but you will succeed. I shall do all I can to help you. I am glad of the progress we have made to-day. Here is *Merlin's Stone*! I am now going to dismiss you. I want you to get on Phantasy and ride forward with Sophy to the Castle, as quick as you both can. Father will, I fear, be alarmed by this time, and your return will set him at ease. You must tell him what has happened, but make as little as you can of Robert's late danger. And Francis! you will stay all night, please. I wish it. I ordered your room to be got ready."

"Thank you, dear Alice. It is just what I was hoping you would do. But you forget that to-morrow is Sunday."

"No I don't; I want you to stay till Monday."

"Then I may send one of the men from the

Castle with a note to Capel Park, directly I can write one, may I? Mother will be expecting my return if I omit that."

"By all means. When you get to the Castle tell Gerard, the first thing, that you want a messenger to ride over to Capel Park with a note."

So Lord Glenarvon and Sophia Bentley quitted the company, and hastened to Castle Delamare.

Let us now hear what has passed between Robert Chesney and Jane Bentley. When they quitted the Bogy's Cliff, Jane's long and painful anxiety had given way to heartfelt, tranquil joy.

"Robert Chesney! I am going to ask you to forgive me for what you will perhaps think very foolish. Do you know that I am rejoicing at that man's escape? He can never show himself in this neighbourhood again."

"I am glad that you are pleased with the day's work. I am quite satisfied too. We are neither of us good haters, Jane."

"No; we are not. That I believe. But, Robert Chesney, tell me, where was the use of pursuing

the man after you had identified him ? You were surely safe from him after that."

"I can't tell you, Jane. I did it very much as a matter of course ; without thinking much about my reason. I suppose any one else would have done the same. I think you yourself, Jane, were at one time inclined to encourage the pursuit rather than otherwise."

"Yes ! at one time I could not help falling into your wishes, as I understood them ; but I regretted it afterwards. My uppermost thought, at all other times, was for your safety. Show me now exactly where the ball struck you. Ha ! I see. Then you will let me be your doctor, will you ? If the bone is not injured, it will soon be well under my management."

"Very well, dear Jane ! but won't Sophy laugh at you ?"

"Oh, no ! Sophy never laughs when she knows it would annoy me. She is far too tender and considerate for that. Only look at her thoughtfulness in sending for Alice to come. It was the best thing that could have been done, for Alice and for all of us."

"I think, Jane, if you are to doctor me, you ought to let me doctor you."

"Oh! I shall not want doctoring at all. Just tell me, Robert Chesney; has Sophy pinned my habit as tidily as the circumstances will admit? Have any of the pins fallen out?"

"It seems to be pinned together most skillfully," said Robert Chesney after examining the back of Jane's habit, "but I don't understand such questions. I suppose the exclusion of daylight is the object? That seems to be thoroughly accomplished."

"Nothing white visible, Robert Chesney?"

"Not a thread, dear Jane. You will let me satisfy myself that you are not much hurt when we get home, won't you?"

"Yes! if you really wish it, and don't believe me."

"That answer indicates that you would rather I did not."

"Does it? Well, I suppose I shall wear an evening dress to-day. You will easily satisfy yourself then, without any fuss."

"J. B. does not like any one to make a fuss about herself. I differ from her there. Nothing I enjoy more thoroughly than to be fussed with by one whom I love. What happy days those were at the Grange, dear Jane?"

"Very, very happy for me, Robert Chesney ! I neither expect nor wish to pass happier."

"Are you not as happy now as you were then, dear Jane?"

"I am very happy at this moment; very happy; but I sometimes feel that something is coming to change my happiness. The events of this day, for instance, are enough to suggest such a feeling. I am happy because they are over. But other things may occur which would set happiness aside; such happiness as that which is past."

"Not if I can prevent them, Jane."

"That is a promise, Robert Chesney. I may some day ask you to perform it. Will you remember it?"

"I will, Jane. I will make it more explicit still. I will promise you never to do, never to

omit doing, anything that you assure me is against or for your happiness."

"Robert Chesney! that is a large promise. Had I asked you to-day not to follow that man, would you have desisted?"

"Heaven knows! If the same thing were to happen to-morrow, I would undertake to obey you. I cannot answer for to-day. If I had known that you were hurt, had I felt that I was leaving you in distress, I would not have stirred from your side to-day. I think I may trust myself to say that much. Yes, Jane! I can say even more than that, and I *will* say it. There is one way in which you may command me always; in which you might have commanded me to-day. It is by appealing to the love I have for you, Jane. Cannot you give yourself a better, an inalienable right to counsel and assist me, Jane?"

"Robert Chesney, I wish no better right, I will seek no better right. I will treasure your love, I will appeal to it at my need; it is the one great blessing of my life. But let me still understand it to be the same love as that which I have

so fondly cherished and encouraged. Do not disturb that happy dream."

"Not if I tell you of my father's wishes, Jane ; of my sister's fondest hopes ?"

"It will not avail, Robert Chesney. You have taught me to worship you ; and I will not dethrone my own idol. Do not urge me by another word. I will never break the vow that I made to my own heart, when I first suffered myself to enjoy the sunshine of your presence and your affection."

"But Jane, dearest Jane, such vows"—

"Peace ! Robert Chesney. Speak no more on the subject. I hold you to the promise you just now made me. And oh ! if you can, forgive me !"

One half-minute, only one half-minute, did Robert Chesney remain silent, and then that smile, that wondrous smile, the inheritance of the Chesneys, lit up his face.

"Jane dearest, I am not so selfish or so dull as not to know what I must say to you now. I am glad that I have spoken, though I might have anticipated your answer, it is better for me to have

had it. And now, dearest Jane, may we, shall we revert to the old sympathies, the old understanding, to everything with which you were so happy before this mistake of mine grew too wildly for me, unaided, to rectify it?"

"Robert Chesney! if I understand you rightly, your words restore my fullest happiness."

"Then you do understand me, dearest Jane; for that was my object. And remember that you are never, by a word or a look, to remind me of this misunderstanding; never to show me that you feel how I once loved you as you did not wish to be loved. If ever you remind me of that, you will be cruel."

"And if ever I give you another moment's pain, Robert Chesney, I shall think myself most cruel."

Robert Chesney and Jane Bentley now reached Merlin's Stone, and were joined by Alice for the remainder of their progress to Castle Delamare. All I think it necessary to say of their conversation is that it resulted in much wonder to Alice Chesney; wonder that she could have looked

upon her brother as altered of late, or that she could have so spoken of him to Lord Glenarvon.

There was nothing so unsightly in Jane Bentley's injury as to prevent her appearance that evening in what ladies call "a low dress;" nor did she object to being joked by wicked Sophy on her vanity, or to being inspected in turn by the whole party.

Lord Glenarvon remarked aside to Sir Robert Chesney, that Miss Bentley's accident had resulted in a general thanksgiving, not merely for her escape, but for the opportunity of inspecting such a contour of neck and shoulders as his, the Earl's, eyes had never before dwelt upon.

Sir Robert was a little deaf, and the Earl's remark, being necessarily uttered in a loud whisper, reached the ears of Alice Chesney. Alice repeated it afterwards to Jane, and they both laughed over the joke together; but Alice also reproved Lord Glenarvon severely for his indulgence in a sarcasm. The truth was that Lord Glenarvon was keenly alive to the perfect symmetry of Jane's form, and had only said

what he meant and felt; but had said it in an off-hand, sybaritical way. The further truth was that Alice Chesney was not only pleased by the remark, and perfectly happy that dear Jane should be admired, but was also not sorry of any opportunity to lecture Lord Glenarvon. And the remaining truth (must I confess it?) was that dear Jane was in very happy spirits that evening, and that the little, the very little, vanity which was in her composition might have peeped out on the occasion.

CHAPTER V.

READER, I am going to hurry you over many months without telling you much of the inner and more interesting life of the several persons whom I have introduced to your notice. We will note the mere externals of those months, and then pass on to matters more precise.

Before the middle of May the party at Delamare Castle was broken up. George Bentley went home to Gossett Grange, and with him went both his sisters, Sophy and Jane, to be bridesmaids at Lucy Bentley's wedding, which was duly celebrated on Tuesday, the twentieth of May, at Fairbourne Church.

In the middle of June Edmund Bentley paid

his long-promised visit to Castle Delamare, taking with him, and leaving behind him, his sister Jane. His visit resulted in much fraternization with Mr. Vaughan, and many wholesome hints and instructions imparted to Robert Chesney, still smitten with a mania for farming and improving. It may definitely be asserted, however, that at this period the slate-quarry on Dinas Hill was paying more in one month than the fondest prognostication could assign to Robert Chesney's farm in three years.

In the end of June Castle Delamare was visited by Mr. and Mrs. Timmins, then completing their bridal tour. Edmund Bentley returned with them into Warwickshire.

In August and the beginning of September, Sir Robert and Alice Chesney, accompanied by Jane Bentley, went on Sir Robert's annual tour through some of the provinces. They finished with the Birmingham Musical Festival (where Sophia Bentley met them), and with a short visit to Gossett Grange. When Sir Robert and Alice Chesney left Gossett Grange for Castle Delamare,

they took Aunt Lucy and Sophia Bentley with them. Jane Bentley remained at the Grange to keep house for her brother Edmund. Aunt Lucy stayed a fortnight at Castle Delamare, and returned to the Grange, leaving Sophia again in special attendance on Sir Robert.

In December, George Bentley, escorting his sister Jane, paid a three weeks' visit to Castle Delamare, and shot pheasants and woodcocks to his heart's content with Robert Chesney and Lord Glenarvon.

While he was there, good news arrived from Calcutta. The Hon. Augustus Verriker's fortunes had turned in a most extraordinary way. He communicated the circumstances in a letter to Robert Chesney. Robert Chesney rehearsed them one morning at breakfast. They were as follows :—

In the previous May Mr. Verriker had been sent on special duty up the country. Unintentionally he had witnessed some riotous brawl in the market-place of a town called Foosherabad, and had befriended a decrepid old man who was

being plundered and ill-used by the mob. Mr. Verriker had rescued the old man, and had never inquired who he was. But it seemed that the old man had been more inquisitive about Mr. Verriker, for in the month of October Mr. Verriker received a polite note from Chunder Husjee, a great Calcutta merchant, stating that he, Mr. Verriker, had been presented with a partnership in the house of Husjee and Co., and that the necessary premium had been paid, and that Mr. Verriker had nothing more to do than call at the principal office of the firm, and sign his name to certain indentures of partnership. It was added that if Mr. Verriker's official duties precluded his taking an active share in the business, his receipts as a sleeping partner would probably be ten or fifteen hundred pounds per annum; but if he preferred working at Calcutta or undertaking the duties of a correspondent in England, his receipts would be double. Mr. Verriker concluded his letter by stating that he meant to accept the offer of the English correspondency, and should return home as soon as the affair could be arranged.

“ And,” added Robert Chesney, as he finished reciting Mr. Verriker’s letter, “ I see the death of Lady Frodsham in the paper. I wonder if that will make any difference to Verriker. At one time she meant to leave him everything, four thousand a year I was told, but he offended her by declining to marry Wilhelmina Ga—(oh ! I forgot ; I was not to mention the name).”

“ And were the old man and the rich merchant the same person ? ” asked Sophy Bentley.

“ Oh yes ! of course they were. Did I omit to state that particular ? ” said Robert Chesney.

When George Bentley left Castle Delamare, Jane remained there, and Sophy returned with him to Gossett Grange.

April came, and with it the commencement of another month’s holiday for George Bentley. A month’s holiday, at this time of the year, meant for him three weeks’ fly-fishing at the least, in South Wales. With him, to Castle Delamare, went his sister Sophia, so that now Gossett Grange was in the sole occupation of Edmund Bentley and Aunt Lucy. But Mr. and Mrs.

Timmins were living very happily hard by, and we need not say that the two families were to each other the best of neighbours.

Now, also, George and Sophia and Jane being all at Castle Delamare, we resume a more succinct narrative of passing events.

The fourteenth of April was what Mr. Vaughan chose to call *audit-day* at Castle Delamare. We shall see presently what Mr. Vaughan meant by *audit-day*. He meant, in the first place, that that there was to be a meeting in the old gallery on that day, a meeting at which he himself was to take the chair. Behold, then, Mr. Vaughan, seated at the head of an oaken table in the afore-said old gallery. At his right is Alice Chesney, at his left is Sir Robert, beyond him on either side are Robert Chesney junior, and George Bentley. The table in front of Mr. Vaughan is loaded with maps, plans, ledgers, packets of letters, and writing materials, most of them placed there, I fancy, for effect. Mr. Vaughan has a little hand-bell at his right, and under his eyes at this moment there is what he calls "A

balance-sheet of the farm occupied by Robert Fitzroy Chesney, Esq., for the year ending Lady Day, 18—." Mr. Vaughan rings his hand-bell. Robert Chesney's bailiff appears. Mr. Vaughan in a low voice puts several questions to that functionary, which are duly and promptly answered ; and then Mr. Vaughan, focusing the balance-sheet once more with his eyeglasses, dismisses the bailiff, with this sage remark, " That will do, Maxwell ; but I think it a question whether those items ought not to be charged against capital."

Mr. Vaughan now explained to the meeting that, by Mr. Chesney's request, he (Mr. Vaughan), assisted by Mr. George Bentley and by the bailiff, Maxwell, had been " taking stock " and examining the accounts of Mr. Chesney's farm for the last year ; that the balance-sheet which he, Mr. Vaughan, held in his hand was the result of such examination ; that it was drawn up by Mr. George Bentley, whose knowledge of the modern plan of procedure in such cases was far superior to Mr. Vaughan's, and to whose judgment and accuracy he (Mr. Vaughan) bore willing testimony. Mr.

Vaughan would not trouble the meeting with details. The general results were these ;—that on a farm of seven hundred and ten acres, the tenant, Mr. Chesney, had invested a capital of three thousand pounds ;—that after paying Sir Robert's rent, interest on the said capital, and all other outgoings, there remained a profit of three hundred and six pounds two shillings and threepence on the year's operations. This Mr. Vaughan considered highly satisfactory, for the first year especially, as the capital aforesaid included a large sum spent on irrigation, the interest whereof was charged against revenue, while as yet the works themselves had only been a week in operation, and could produce no return till the end of another summer.

Mr. Vaughan's summing-up was received with due attention and respect by all his assessors, especially by Miss Chesney, who had not understood a word of Mr. Vaughan's statement, but who knew that *audit-day* was the greatest day in the year to Mr. Vaughan's thinking, and who determined that on that day the old friend of the

family and her own acknowledged worshipper should be humoured to the top of his bent. Alice Chesney was in fact seated at that board, partly that she might increase the number of Mr. Vaughan's hearers, partly that she might see that his will and pleasure were not thwarted by any one present, or in any respect.

And now Mr. Vaughan assumes an air of still greater importance. He is about to audit the balance-sheet of Dinas slate-quarry. No one but himself knows as yet the results of the first year's operations. Mr. Vaughan's hand-bell is rung again. "Send Mr. Howells and Mr. Roberts here, if you please." Mr. Howells and Mr. Roberts appear. One is foreman, the other is head-clerk of Dinas slate-works. Each is examined in turn by Mr. Vaughan, who from their statements makes one or two trifling alterations in his memoranda. But the balance-sheet—that appears to be quite correct; no statement in that needs alteration. Messrs. Howells and Roberts are dismissed from the audit-room.

Mr. Vaughan now proceeded to address the

meeting. He stated that it would not be necessary for him to enter into the account of capital expended on the Dinas slate-quarry ; in point of fact, there was no capital account ; it was closed. Every farthing which had been expended on the works had been charged against the receipts of the first year and paid out of revenue. If the works were closed to-morrow and every workman dismissed, Sir Robert would find himself not only clear of debt, as regarded the quarry, but that he might sell the plant and stock-in-hand and put the proceeds in his pocket. Mr. Vaughan said that this way of looking on the subject indicated a stock-in-hand worth not less than two thousand pounds ; and there were debts due to the quarry of a thousand pounds more. These, however, were profits not yet realized, and would therefore go into future accounts. "The realized profit, after paying every debt and expense incurred in the last year, is," said Mr. Vaughan, "the sum of five thousand five hundred pounds, and that sum stands at Sir Robert Chesney's disposal in the bank of Messrs. Glyn and Co., London."

“Astonishing !” exclaimed Robert Chesney. “I had no idea that such results were possible. I am sure that both my father and myself can have but one feeling on the subject, a very grateful feeling to you, Mr. Vaughan, for the discernment and patience and energy and, I will add, devoted zeal, which you have brought to bear upon our interests.”

Alice Chesney learnt the success of Mr. Vaughan’s labours, not so much from the worthy man’s statistics, as from the air of affectionate triumph which shone forth from his countenance, and from the hearty tones in which her brother had spoken.

“And I am sure I ought to add my gratitude and praises on the occasion, Mr. Vaughan,” she said.

“Yes, indeed,” said Sir Robert, “it is all due to Cousin Vaughan. It is beyond my utmost expectations or wishes.”

Mr. Vaughan bowed to each speaker in turn. He then informed them that the profits of the next year from the Dinas Quarry would to a certainty

be double those of the last, and that, at that rate, the Quarry would, in eight years' time, pay off the whole debt on the Delamare estate.

"Provided my father buys no more land," said Robert Chesney, aside to Alice.

Then the meeting broke up, and Mr. Vaughan remained in the 'old gallery' to receive from various tenants their rents, due at the preceding Michaelmas.

Such were the cheering prospects which the fourteenth of April brought to those who studied at Castle Delamare the financial position of Sir Robert Chesney.

A very different scene did that same day disclose to Edmund Bentley and his Aunt, at Gossett Grange. Continued disease among his cattle, and another failure of his wheat-crop were already settled calamities in Edmund Bentley's anticipation. There was another *dead year* as regarded profits from his farm, and many outstanding debts, due to his former generosity, were ascertained to be hopelessly bad.

But Edmund Bentley was not yet down-hearted.

He could stand, not only two, but five such years, by resorting to his capital, and before that would be expended, surely the tide would turn. Not by one sixpence would he reduce the expenditure which contributed in any way to the comfort or welfare of his brother and sisters. He must be more cautious in lending money, which now he could hardly consider to be his own to lend.

That, no doubt, was a very sound principle of Edmund Bentley's, but somehow he had as yet neglected to apply it in a certain important instance to which his attention had not in fact been drawn. Edmund Bentley's capital, like that of his father before him, had always existed in a convertible, and therefore an available shape. It consisted of so many thousand pounds (eleven thousand we believe, it was at this juncture) placed on deposit, and at a good rate of interest, with Messrs. Newbridge and Co., the well-known Bankers, of D——.

Miss Barnes had three thousand pounds invested in the same way. The post of the fourteenth of April brought letters, both to Edmund Bentley

and to his Aunt, to tell them that, on the previous Monday, Messrs. Newbridge and Co. had suspended payment.

During the following week, Edmund Bentley paid several visits to D——; but it took less than a week to discover the real state of the case. Mr. Newbridge was a myth; such a man had existed once, but had been dead twenty years; his heirs had no concern in the bank. The real partners were all, more or less, swindlers, and had absconded. The bank had been insolvent fifteen years. Neither creditors nor depositors could expect a dividend of more than sixpence in the pound; and so Edmund Bentley and his family were ruined. There was but one consolation for Edmund Bentley. Two thousand pounds, which had represented his sister Lucy's fortune, had been withdrawn from the bank many months before, and so rescued. That money was now at the disposal of himself and another, as trustees of Mr. and Mrs. Timmins's marriage settlement. It was invested in Government securities.

When Edmund Bentley had realized the full

extent of his misfortunes the hour of his deepest bitterness was past. He knew the worst, and now it lay on himself to better it. The first thing he did was to write to the Duke of Harchester's agents, stating his position, and asking permission to surrender the outstanding term of his lease. His lease, he well knew, gave him a power of transferring it, but he thought it more honourable to deal with his landlord and accept such consideration as the Duke might be pleased to afford him. As soon as Edmund Bentley had done this, he wrote to his sister Jane, giving her a full account of all that had happened, and of his letter to the Duke's agents. For the future, he said, there was but one prospect. He and George must work. What with their earnings, the proceeds of a sale at Gossett Grange, and the sum which he expected to receive for the surrender of his lease, there would be quite enough to secure a home for his Aunt and sisters. To do that was his next object.

Jane Bentley got her brother's letter on the morning of the twenty-sixth of April. She was

seated with her sister in Alice Chesney's boudoir, and Alice herself was present. The two sisters were working, and Alice, who had been reading aloud, stopped while Jane perused the letter. Before she had read half of it, Sophy was on her knees beside her sister.

"Trouble, dearest Jane! It must indeed be trouble when you show it so plainly in your face. But go on to the end. It is from Edmund, I see, and he would wish you to know of trouble first." And Sophy twined her arm round Jane, and gazed up into her face while she drained the cup of bitterness.

"There, Sophy, dear, I have done. Read it yourself. It is for you as well as for me; but it is far worse for Edmund and for George than for either of us."

Neither Alice nor Jane spoke again, till Sophy had read the letter.

"It is not so very, very bad, dearest Jane, except for Edmund and George. We must not be idle while they work."

"May I know what has happened, dears?"

said Alice Chesney. "I hope there is no trouble for any of you that I may not share."

Jane Bentley told Alice Chesney the substance of Edmund's letter, and then, having cursorily re-perused it, handed the letter itself to Alice.

"Dears, I saw the failure of this bank in the newspaper. Mr. Vaughan, too, was talking of it, and of the misery it would cause to many. How little did I think that you were among the number. But, Jane dearest, as Sophy says, it is not so very bad. But I do not quite understand the whole state of the case. Mr. Vaughan will be sure to know what chances there are of the bankers' acting honestly: he will know better than any of us. May I take Edmund's letter and show it to Mr. Vaughan, dears?"

"I shall be glad of his opinion, Alice, before I write to Edmund," said Jane Bentley.

Miss Chesney inferred the permission she had asked, and left the room with the letter.

"What a mercy," said Sophy. "that dear Lucy's money has been saved."

"Yes," said Jane; "that is the one consolation."

"And there will be others soon, Jane. Look what friends we have. God, who sent them to us when we were prosperous, will send us other help in our adversity."

"Yes, Sophy. I cannot believe that so good a man as Edmund is, will be deserted in his need. But we must not appeal to earthly friends, Sophy, except for sympathy. We must rely on ourselves."

"Yes, Jane dear, I shall feel it no hardship to work. I suppose that you and I must get situations."

"No, Sophy, Edmund must have a home wherever he goes; and you and Aunt must make it for him. Rob Edmund of his home, and he will become a cipher—a lost being. You shall never work, Sophy; never work for hire, I mean. I shall bear up against everything till that day comes. Then I shall be undone. Promise me never to think of that, Sophy."

"I will do as you do, Jane."

"Never, my pride! my treasure! I was made for employment, you for happiness—the happiness

of yourself and others. You will promise me, Sophy, won't you ?”

“No, my own Jane. I should think it a weak, a wrong beginning of our struggle to make such a promise. Let us talk of what ought to be done now,—done immediately, Jane.”

“Yes, Sophy ; we must think of that. I will write to Edmund to-day, and go to him to-morrow.”

“Yes, Jane ; one or both of us ought to go. Let me go.”

“No, Sophy, I must go : I wish to go, if you will give up that point to me.”

“How can you go by yourself, Jane ? It is not to be thought of. Either George or I must go with you. Let me go with you and leave George here.”

“Very well, Sophy ; I will agree to that, if you will make me the promise that I asked you to make.”

“No ! I can't Jane ; I can't.”

“Then, Sophy, you will remain here, and George with you. I shall go to the Grange

to-morrow. When our future plans are arranged, George will be here to take you to the Grange."

"Then it seems that I am worthless;—not even to be trusted to travel by myself. Oh, Jane!"

"Sophy, don't be perverse. I did not mean anything of the kind. I am trying to see my way; that is all."

"Very well, Jane, don't look distressed; and then I will do everything you tell me."

Let us now, reader, follow the steps of Miss Chesney to the counting-house of Mr. Vaughan. Mr. Vaughan's *sanctum* was shut up, and would not be open again that day. He was gone out on business. He would be back to dinner at the Castle.

"Just what I expected," mused Alice Chesney. "Mr. Vaughan's absence is a fair excuse for my consulting Robert. Gerard, do you know where my brother is?"

"No, my Lady; but not far off, I'm thinking. I will inquire, my Lady."

Mr. Gerard was absent five minutes, and re-

turned to Miss Chesney with the intelligence that "young Sir Robert" had just then ridden into the stable-yard on his pony. Miss Chesney hastened to meet her brother, and they had a conference in a spot very often frequented by the diplomatists of the family, the room of Mrs. Hughes, the housekeeper.

Robert Chesney read Edmund Bentley's letter, and listened to many enthusiastic remarks and exhortations of his high-souled sister with great respect. At length he said,—

"Yes, Alice; you have enunciated the law with your usual fervour and honesty. The only thing for me is obedience, and to see how the law is to be carried out. There, dear, don't look angry and majestic. My only wish in this matter is to be your slave. Your will is mine. We shall act together in the most perfect harmony. We must help Edmund Bentley to the uttermost, and without his knowing it. That is our programme, Alice, is it not?"

"Yes, Robert dear; I thought you would decide in that way. Now tell me what you will do."

"I am thinking, Alice. If you won't frighten

me with your imperious impetuosity, my thoughts will flow more tranquilly."

"Now, Robert dear; don't be sarcastic. If you will devise a plan for doing what you propose, I will go on my knees to thank you."

"Upon my word I should like to see that. That would be a luxury worth any amount of pains or labour. Suppose you give me a fore-taste, Alice; just one moment of that style of humiliation."

"No, Robert, I shall spoil my dress; I will give you a kiss instead, if you will begin to talk seriously."

"Very well, dear; I shall appreciate that and your earnestness. Let me have the kiss, and then I will proceed."

"There are one,—two,—three,—four,—five, for you, Robert; more than I ever gave to any one yet, I assure you."

"A royal salute then, Alice, and very much appreciated for its heartiness. And now to council. Suppose I write to Heriot. He is at this moment staying with his grandfather in Belgrave

Square, and I fancy they are on good terms. Moreover, the Duke is not an ungenerous man, when taken in the right way. Heriot and he get on very well together, when politics are not concerned. And I think that Heriot has some voice in the management of the Warwickshire property, independently of the Duke."

"And, Robert, you can depend on Lord Heriot doing his best for Edmund, can you?"

"Yes, surely. I know Heriot very well, and Edmund better still. I can introduce them to each other in a way that cannot fail to lead to good results."

"Oh! how delightful. Now you will write at once, will you not?—And tell me;—what am I to say about this to Sophy and Jane?"

"Ah! they will be in suspense some days; that is true. It cannot be avoided. Tell them that you have spoken to me, and that I am writing to Lord Heriot to get the best terms I can from the Duke as to Edmund's lease."

"Oh! Robert, how can I thank you enough for such forethought and consideration?"

"Shall I tell you how, Alice?"

"Yes, if you will. I will indeed show my thankfulness in any way that you will point out."

"Then, five more kisses for me, and a little, a very little, more occasional consideration for the feelings of a certain noble friend of ours, Alice."

"Oh! Robert, you misjudge me. I am not unfeeling to Lord Glenarvon. He would not say so, if you asked him."

"No! he seems to have learnt his lesson too well for that. I am sorry for him sometimes. If you are not, Alice, it is because you will not see what I see."

"I will think of what you say, Robert; but you know how I am situated. I will try to meet your wishes."

"Very well, dear. A promise from you is always an assurance. As soon as I have written to Heriot, I should like to talk this matter over with Jane. Will you tell her so, dear?"

"Yes, Robert; I will go to Jane now, and tell her."

Robert Chesney's letter to Lord Heriot was an

extraordinarily long one. Its contents I am not able to disclose ; and if I guess at some part of those contents, I don't know that it would be quite right for me to express my surmises. My readers will guess as well as I, when they hear the results of that letter, which they soon will do.

Robert Chesney's conference with Jane Bentley is quite another matter. That I am permitted to transcribe. It began with an equal knowledge of facts on both sides ; that is, both of them had read Edmund Bentley's letter.

"Jane dear, I need not tell you of my feelings on this sad occasion. But you must not grieve more than I do. Try to think that all will be well yet."

"Yes, Robert Chesney, I will try. I have some hope already from the letter which Alice told me you would write to Lord Heriot. I think the Duke cannot forget how long our family has been a part of his estate, or how loyally we have always felt and acted towards our chief."

"No, Jane ; it is impossible that that, and many other considerations which I have urged,

can be forgotten. Edmund Bentley is not going to leave Gossett Grange, if Lord Heriot can prevent it."

"You would not encourage a vain hope, Robert Chesney, I know. If Lord Heriot has your good opinion, it is enough for me. I hope again. Still I feel that Edmund must be, and must remain, under great anxiety, till the Duke's decision is known. I think that we—I, at all events, ought to go to Edmund. I wish to go to-morrow, if you will arrange my journey for me."

"There is no necessity for your going, Jane. Write to your brother, and tell him what has been done. Wait here, at least till I get Heriot's reply."

"I would rather go at once to Edmund."

"Very well, be it so, then; but if you go, I go too."

"I can travel very well by myself. I would rather go by myself. It is a sad house for you to go to, is Gossett Grange, Robert Chesney. Let me have my own way once more."

"So you shall, dear Jane. Go, if you insist

upon it. Go alone, if you prefer it ; but then I shall have *my* way when you are gone, and I shall follow you."

"Can you really leave home for a few days without inconveniencing yourself or any one else, Robert Chesney?"

"Yes, I can, and I mean to do it. I shall go to Gossett Grange with you to-morrow, Jane, if you go, as I see you will. I shall go, not expecting to be of any use, nor as a necessary escort for you, but with the selfish object of bringing you back here when you have had your own way. Now, I am going to my study. I must add a postscript to my letter to Heriot, telling him to direct his answer to me at the Grange. And you will write to Edmund, please, and tell him to expect us both on Thursday or Friday."

"But, Robert Chesney—"

"Now, not another word, Jane ! The plan is essentially your own, and you must be satisfied with it. We will start as early as you please in the morning. If you have time this afternoon, will you ride over to Capel with me ? I want to

call on Lady Glenarvon about some poultry we settled to purchase together. Will you ride Phantasy, or one of the ponies?"

"Whichever you think best. Snow had a long day yesterday. Perhaps he ought to rest."

"Very well ! Then you shall have Phantasy."

CHAPTER VI.

THE reader will be pleased to understand that three whole days, and rather more, have transpired since the close of the last chapter. Robert Chesney and Jane Bentley are hourly expected at Gossett Grange; but for the present I must bespeak the reader's attendance in another place, viz. in the dining-room of Strawberry Cottage. Mr. and Mrs. Gumming give a dinner-party to-day. They have the same or nearly the same guests as those whom we saw dining there once before,—to wit, Mr. Thorn, Mr. Boiler, and Mr. Spratt; but not Mr. Timmins, and certainly not Mr. Verriker.

The great catastrophe which has befallen Gos-

sett Grange has been the talk of Fairbourne for a week. Mr. Gumming has spent nearly all his time at the Post-office, gathering such scraps of intelligence as he could from persons who passed by along the village street, or who called to deposit letters on Mrs. Higgs's well-known table. Mrs. Gumming had had no rest by reason of hourly visitors at the cottage, each visitor calculating on a hearty welcome, if only he or she were bringing to Mrs. Gumming some item of fresh news about the failure of Newbridge's Bank, or about the state of things at the Grange.

And now, all facts having been collected, it is time that they should be sifted by the most competent authorities. Mr. and Mrs. Gumming give their dinner for that very purpose. It is not right, Mr. Gumming thinks, that the parish should be any longer disturbed by conflicting rumours, while he and his supporters are prepared to investigate and to certify the real merits of the case.

Mr. Thorn, it must be acknowledged, does not seem quite adequate to this momentous occasion.

He sits at Mr. Gumming's table, in a state apparently of apathetic indifference. He used to be fond of tittle-tattle, but now he seems neither to know, nor to care to know, anything about his neighbours. Mr. Thorn has aged very much since we last saw him. He often hears of his nephew; nay! he is often annoyed by his nephew, who is both drunken and extravagant. Mr. Gumming considers that young Thorn's conduct is gradually breaking his uncle's heart, and yet Mr. Thorn still shows occasional symptoms of an inclination to forgive and forget it all. Mr. Gumming has repeatedly pointed out to Mr. Thorn the weakness of such mistaken kindness; and the bad example Mr. Thorn is setting to parents and guardians in general, and the encouragement which he is giving to other youths to defy the lawful authority of their friends. Mr. Gumming has fortified all his admonitions by quotations from Scripture; but still Mr. Thorn's symptoms *will* recur. Happily Mrs. Gumming's influence over Mr. Thorn has increased rather than subsided. Mr. Thorn is nearly always at

the Cottage, and so far he is nearly always removed from any temptation to mischievous lenity about his nephew.

We will not attempt to give any detailed account of the discussion which took place during and after dinner at Strawberry Cottage. The broad results which were arrived at, will be sufficient for the reader, involving, as they did, an authoritative decision on many questions of law and fact, as well as on some points of moral and social propriety.

As regarded Newbridge's Bank, it was found that there would be no dividend at all; that Edmund Bentley had kept two accounts there, a deposit, and a current account; that on the former he had lost everything, but on the latter he owed a considerable amount to the bank, having been allowed to *overdraw*. It was contended and decided that this last sum would have to be paid as a debt to the bank, and that the credit which Edmund Bentley had, in his deposit account, would not be allowed as a *set-off* to the debt.

It was further declared, on good authority, that

Edmund Bentley had left his elder sister's fortune in Newbridge's hands, to the intent that he, as trustee, might pocket the difference between the interest allowed by Newbridge and Co., and that obtainable in the *three per cents*. Moreover, that Edmund Bentley, having invested his sister's fortune in an unlawful way, and having lost it, would be obliged to refund the whole to his co-trustee, and, failing that, would be liable to a criminal prosecution for fraud and embezzlement.

It was further found that Edmund Bentley's rent was a year in arrear, that his lease was thereby forfeited, and that the Duke of Harchester's agents were about to levy a distress at Gossett Grange; and that that was the reason why the two Misses Bentley and their younger brother were kept away from the place.

It was further decided that a very keen watch ought to be kept on Edmund Bentley himself, inasmuch as he was one of the overseers of the poor that year, and had public money in his possession, with which he might be tempted to abscond.

The law of the above decisions had been mainly supplied by Mr. Boiler, who spoke authoritatively on such subjects, having, as he stated, a cousin who was a clerk in one of the Bankruptcy Courts, and with whom he, Boiler, had been recently in correspondence.

It remained for some one of the party to enunciate such moral reflections as seemed naturally to result from the premises. This was deemed by Mr. Gumming to be his special province; but he spoke very interjectionally on the occasion, and most of his remarks were short passages of Scripture, which I think it better not to repeat. Mrs. Gumming threw in a word now and then, confining her remarks to such axioms as seemed to relate to the females of the Bentley family.

"Caames of associating with one's betters!" said Mr. Gumming.

"Those girls ought never to have been exposed to such temptations!" said Mrs. Gumming.

"Ah! pride will have a faall. Over educaated, I saay. Phœbe never learnt French; not she!" said Mr. Gumming.

"And poor Miss Barnes ! after slaving all her life for them ; to be robbed in this way !" said Mrs. Gumming.

"Miss Paarnes ruined, penniless ! Ingratitude ! Baad, very baad ! Caames of paampering the idleness and folly of youth, Mr. Thaarn ! Miss Paarnes ! worthy woman : too indulgent ! Phcebe aalways saaid so."

"What *is* to become of those girls ? They can never marry after being spoken of as they have been. No one would think of asking them ; at least none of *our* friends, I hope !" said Mrs. Gumming.

"Not I," said Spratt, "if you allude to me, Mrs. Gumming."

"No, Mr. Spratt, I give you credit for more good sense !" said Mrs. Gumming.

"Spraatt knaaws better than thaat, Phcebe ! Spraatt not gaaing to maarry ! Not without speaking to me or Phœbe first. Spraatt taake the Graange Faarm ! More caapital ; less pride. Do well at the Graange, Spraatt ! Phœbe get Spraatt a wife ! one of the right saart," said Mr. Gumming.

"I really think that such a lesson as this ought to be turned to the good of the parish. I do hope Mr. Gumming will not let any false delicacy prevent his alluding to it from the pulpit," said Mrs. Gumming.

"Pulpit! Yes! Pulpit! Sermon! Naa time this week. Next week, perhaaps. After the sale at Gaassett Graange," said Mr. Gumming.

I must leave the reader to imagine a good deal more of like conversation, with frequent repetitions of the more telling sentiments; and, on the part of Mr. Gumming, with a more than average of kickings, stampings, thigh-slappings, snortings, and snufflings.

By the following Sunday it was currently believed in Fairbourne, that Mr. Gumming would allude in his sermon to the passing events of the period. There was consequently an overflowing congregation at morning service; and at afternoon service too, but for a different reason. Those who came so redundantly to morning service, though they did not hear what they expected, saw something which they did not expect; and

those that came in the afternoon, came to see the same phenomenon ; and were not disappointed. The phenomenon in question was in the Grange pew. There stood Miss Barnes ; placid, attentive, and devout as ever. There stood Edmund Bentley, with his usual modest, downcast, reverential look, it is true, but not as yet with those marks of remorse and fear which would seem to have been appropriate to his supposed situation. There, too, stood the noble form of Robert Chesney, his aspect of youth and health tempered only by that air of thorough-bred refinement which ever attended him, and that tone of unaffected humility which always befel him in the house of God.

And there, by his side, was Jane Bentley ; the same as ever in appearance ; perhaps a little more robust ; but the same in all that exquisite neatness and propriety of costume, that unconscious dignity of bearing, that serene contentment of face, that perfect purity of expression, which were so many parts of her nature :—Jane Bentley, never once raising her eyes from her book or

from the ground ! never casting a thought beyond the words which she read or heard ! totally absorbed in her spiritual life !

And then, when each service is ended, Robert Chesney takes the lead of the Grange party on its homeward way, and, leaning on his arm, is Jane Bentley.

The mind of Fairbourne is again wavering. Its conclusions have been unsettled. It waits the further instructions of its recognised leaders, what to believe, what to suspect, what to repudiate. The Gummings will have to give another dinner-party before the popular creed can be remodelled.

Monday came, and with it came several letters for Robert Chesney. We must notice three of the number. One is from Mr. Verriker. He was ere this on his way home. He had heard of Lady Frodsham's death, and, though he understood that she had left him a fair independency, that was not the main reason of his coming home. In fact, he was no longer a soldier but a merchant, and should have to attend to the London

business of his firm. "Shall pay a visit to Castle Delamare as soon as said business will permit. Kindest remembrances to all there, and to all at Gossett Grange. Trust I am not forgotten at either place."

So much of Mr. Verriker's letter did Robert Chesney communicate to Edmund and Jane Bentley. Robert Chesney's second letter, which, like the last, had been forwarded from Castle Delamare, was a French letter. It was from the Curé of Morlaix, a town on the coast of Brittany. Its purport was as follows :—The Curé wrote on behalf of one of his flock, a woman, whose name he was not permitted to disclose. This woman had in her possession a manuscript which had been bequeathed to her by a relation, as a thing of great value; of especial value to any member of the Chesney family. It was now offered to Robert Fitzroy Chesney, Esq., by the woman's directions, for the sum of two thousand francs. The Curé was to hold the said manuscript till the offer was accepted or declined. In the former case, he guaranteed its delivery to Robert Ches-

ney; in the latter, he should restore it to its present owner.

The Curé was authorized to give some description, but not a copy of the manuscript. It consisted of two sheets of paper, one small, the other large; they were fastened together at one corner. The smaller sheet contained six lines; verses apparently, but in the English language, which the Curé did not understand. The writing had been originally in pencil, but the pencil-marks had all been superinscribed with ink. Between the last lines and underneath two of the words, two notes had been inserted. They were in a different hand to the verses. The woman stated that they were explanatory of the words under which they were written. Of that the Curé could not judge.

The larger sheet was filled with writing in the same hand as the interlineations of the smaller sheet. It had a date, viz. the year 1723, and it was signed by Ephraim Howle. The woman said it was Ephraim Howle's Will, giving some account of the annexed sheet of paper, and of its

value to the Chesney family, and some further explanations of the prophecy which, as she said, the lesser sheet contained. The testator, so the woman declared, then bequeathed the said lesser sheet of paper and all his other effects to his granddaughter, Mary Morgan, from whom the woman stated herself to have inherited the document.

Mr. Chesney handed the Curé's letter over to Jane Bentley. It was quite clear that the smaller sheet of paper was Sir Rodolph Chesney's copy of the scroll in *Sir Arthur's Hall*; and that the rest was Ephraim Howle's interpretation and intended utilization thereof. Of course, it was worth nothing to the Chesneys, as they had a copy of the original, and had no reason to value Howle's commentary on a document which he had probably stolen.

Jane Bentley suggested that Ephraim Howle was probably the old man who had assisted Sir Rodolph Chesney to remove the coffin of Sir Lionel to Llandeви Church;—also that that old man was akin to Jedediah Howle, who had more

or less to do with Sir Arthur Chesney, the framer of the prophecy. If so, Ephraim Howle's interpretation might have been derived from Jedediah, and might be of interest, if not of value.

Robert Chesney did not attend very much to this suggestion. He was intent on another subject now. He afterwards wrote to the French Curé to decline the offer, on the ground that the price asked for a mere curiosity was exorbitant. Mr. Chesney now turned to his third letter. It was from Lord Heriot. He handed it, open, to Edmund Bentley. It ran as follows:—

No. —, Belgrave Square, London,

May, 18—.

My dear Chesney,—Believe me, that nothing has given me greater pleasure of late, than to have been able to carry out your benevolent suggestions, and thus to have renewed our old friendship in a way so appropriate to yourself. I should have written to you sooner, but you are aware that the very nature of the case involved some negotiation with the Duke and his agents.

It is all settled now, and if to your and Mr. Bentley's satisfaction, then certainly to mine. The Duke desires me to say to Mr. Bentley (and perhaps you will deliver the message) that he (the Duke), after full inquiry, quite recognises the claims which Mr. Bentley and his predecessors have established on their landlord's consideration, and that he sincerely commiserates them in misfortunes which seem to be due to no fault or negligence of Mr. B. The Duke will exonerate Mr. Bentley from payment of rent for two years to come, and the agents have instructions to forward the necessary receipts to Mr. B. by to-morrow's post.

I am almost ashamed to tell you that this negotiation, which I undertook certainly without selfish motives, has resulted in considerable advantage to myself. The Duke's Warwickshire estate was charged to some extent in my favour, as his presumptive heir. He has now surrendered his life-interest in the residue to me, and I undertake the sole management, thus receiving something like two thousand a year

for my trouble. I am not to interfere with the political leanings of the tenantry; that is my grandfather's sole and very characteristic reservation.

By the way, I may now consider Mr. Bentley as my own tenant. Will you tell him that, should he be under any temporary need of capital, owing to his losses with the D—— Bank, I shall be too happy to advance him any amount within my means, leaving the question of interest to his own judgment.

I trust that this letter will at least qualify the distress of a very deserving family, in whose welfare you have interested me deeply. I hope to hear from you again soon, with some report of their well-being. I will then write to you on other subjects, which the pressure of parliamentary business must exclude for to-day.

Believe me, dear Chesney, to be always your devoted friend.

HERIOT.

The reader will easily believe that the perusal of the above letter was too much for Edmund

Bentley ; and, in turn, too much for Jane. According to my wont, I pass over a scene which was in a manner consecrated by the depth and simplicity of the feelings which were evoked.

But it would seem that fortune had not yet done her work in retrieving the mishaps of the Bentleys. They had a few well-known and steadfast friends, but they had other friends whom they knew not of. The self-same post, which brought Robert Chesney three letters, brought Edmund Bentley one. It contained a sum of two thousand pounds in Bank of England notes. The notes were enclosed in a half-sheet of note-paper with these words, scribbled in an almost illegible hand, thereon :—

“For Edmund Bentley and his brother, from an unknown friend, who appreciates worth, and feels for misfortune.”

The letter had been posted in London, but was directed in a different hand to that in which the above sentence was written.

Edmund Bentley now produced this letter and its contents, and very naturally, as I think,

charged Robert Chesney with having contrived or been privy to the matter.

Robert Chesney solemnly denied all complicity. He neither recognised the handwriting of the note, nor of the address; he neither knew nor could he guess the source from which the letter came. He was only glad to know that there were people who could do a kind act without claiming the credit of it; and who were clever enough to do it in a way which precluded the possibility of its being rejected. "My dear Edmund," said Robert Chesney, "you need feel no delicacy in accepting what you can't refuse. This generosity, for such it truly is, may possibly not be meant exclusively for yourself. It may, for all we know, be a tribute to the memory of your father or to the worth of other members of your family. Individually, it is only a compliment to yourself, as it makes you a kind of trustee for all whom it will benefit."

I must here inform the reader of what, after his solemn assertion, will easily be believed, viz. that Robert Chesney was quite as puzzled about

this two thousand pounds as the Bentleys themselves. He attributed the gift to some friend of theirs, of whom he had never heard. He knew nothing whatever about it. I don't say that his sister, Alice, her friends and accomplices, were equally ignorant. I only say that they were never suspected of the fraud, not even by Robert Chesney.

And now that I am so communicative, I will tell the reader another secret, though it may lead to an imputation on Robert Chesney's character for pure and simple veracity. What the Duke of Harchester really and personally gave up to Edmund Bentley was *one* year's rent. The second year's rent was, half of it, paid by Robert Chesney, half of it released by Lord Heriot. The thing was managed by a sort of juggle between him and Lord Heriot; the latter lending himself and his pen to mask the strategy of the former.

On the day following that on which the above letters were received, Edmund Bentley was surprised, and at length deeply gratified, by a visit from Mr. Thorn. Mr. Thorn expressed much

sympathy for Edmund, and many regrets at learning that there was a likelihood of the family leaving the Grange. Mr. Thorn concluded by a very liberal offer, viz. to advance any sum of money which would suffice to enable Edmund Bentley to weather the storm, and to retain his lease. Edmund Bentley saw at once that Mr. Thorn was in earnest; but, instead of rejecting Mr. Thorn's offer, Edmund Bentley told Mr. Thorn plainly that the kind feeling which it implied was much more precious to himself than money; and that, if need should arise, he would have no hesitation in reminding Mr. Thorn of his kind proposal. Edmund Bentley then explained to Mr. Thorn that, by the liberality of his landlord and the help of other friends, he should be enabled to carry-on for many years; but that he hoped that Mr. Thorn and himself would henceforth be on more intimate terms than they had been.

"Why! you see, Mr. Bentley, I have had many troubles, many misgivings. Money doesn't save a man from trouble, Mr. Bentley. It only

helps him into trouble. I spoilt Richard when he was a boy, and now he turns against me. I spoilt him with money. I would sooner throw all my money into the nearest dyke than go through what it has cost me, again. I should have been right glad to have placed some of it at your service, Mr. Bentley, but as you want it no more than I do, I will say no other word on that subject. I hope all your family be well, Mr. Bentley."

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Thorn; all very well, now that we know that our home is still to be ours. Sophy and George are away; but my sister Jane is here. Won't you stay luncheon, Mr. Thorn, and ask Jane how she is, after her long absence?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Bentley, I must be off home to see after the *things*. I saw Miss Jane in church last Sunday, and, thinks I, there is the right sort to make a man happy."

"I will tell Jane what you say, Mr. Thorn. I quite agree with you myself. We all worship Jane; but instead of making *one man* happy, she prefers making every one happy who knows her."

“ Ah ! that is the right sort, Mr. Bentley ; the right sort. It is a pity there isn't more of that sort, Mr. Bentley. Good morning, Mr. Bentley. Look in, if you are coming my way, any time, Mr. Bentley.”

Reader ! in all the above narrative I have disgracefully neglected to make any mention of Mr. and Mrs. Timmins. You must guess at their goings-out and comings-in at Gossett Grange. They were a very happy couple, devoted to each other, and to all that belonged to each other. The only matter of retrenchment which was, at this epoch, adopted at Gossett Grange was, that Mr. and Mrs. Timmins were to come and live there, and so make one household with the Bentleys. I don't know, after all, that retrenchment was so much an object in this arrangement as other considerations. Mr. Timmins's house was very nice, but also very small. An uncle and aunt of his wished to live near him, and to rent a house of that size. They were good, kind people, and Mr. and Mrs. Timmins thought they might just as well give up their own house to the

uncle and aunt, and go and live at Gossett Grange. Moreover Mr. Timmins's farm adjoined Edmund Bentley's, and the greater part of it was as near to Gossett Grange as to Monk-barn (Mr. Timmins's house). There were other reasons for the change, all of them of more importance than the mere question of economy. For instance, Mrs. Timmins had at this time an especial anxiety to be near Aunt Lucy; and Aunt Lucy was equally anxious to be near her niece; so they couldn't do better than live in the same house.

On the 8th of May, Mr. and Mrs. Timmins took up their abode at Gossett Grange, and on Monday, the 10th of May, Robert Chesney left Gossett Grange for Castle Delamare. According to his previous stipulation, Jane Bentley went with him.

A few days after Mr. Chesney's return to Castle Delamare, George Bentley went home to Gossett Grange. It had been decided that his school-days were over. He was now to keep a year's terms at the famous agricultural college of C——.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM a Birmingham newspaper of May the 20th, 18—, I have made the following extracts :—

“ BIRTHS.”

“ On the 18th instant, at Gossett Grange, the wife of Frederick Timmins, Esq., of Monk-barn, of a daughter.”

“ MARRIAGES.”

“ On the 15th instant, at Ryde, in the Isle of Wight, George Thorn, Esq., of Fairbourne Hall, in this county, to Julia, relict of the late John Anthony, of Southampton, gent.”

It is with much satisfaction that I relate that on Friday, the 21st of May, Mrs. Timmins and her daughter were reported as “doing very

well." The Fairbourne people were glad to hear the report; for the little stranger was the first of a new generation, a new generation as regarded what Mr. Thorn called the "right sort,"—that is of the Bentley blood. For Fairbourne was again beginning to recognise the fact that the Bentleys were very highly to be respected.

But what are Fairbourne bells ringing so merrily for on the morning of this same 21st of May;—not surely for Miss Timmins's arrival? No, it is for the marriage of Mr. Thorn, now first announced to the public. Suddenly the bells cease! Why is that? Oh! Mr. Gumming has sent to request that "the ringers will desist, as Mrs. Gumming is not very well, and the noise disturbs her."

Mr. Gumming spoke the truth. Neither Mrs. Gumming nor himself felt "very well" when they heard of Mr. Thorn's marriage. The sound of rejoicing at such a fact "disturbed" them both. Mr. Gumming did not spend much of that day at the post-office. What with the Bent-

ley *renaissances* and the Thorn extravaganza, his soul was ill at ease. Mr. Gumming went and dined with Mr. Boiler that day.

Mr. Thorn's marriage had come about in this way. The very day that he called on Edmund Bentley, feeling unusually distressed, he conceived the sudden idea of going up to London and consulting a physician. Mr. Thorn fancied that he had heart-disease. Dr. A——, after giving great attention to Mr. Thorn's statements, told him that there was nothing the matter with his heart or any other vital organ; and that his symptoms were the result of leading a solitary and unsociable life, for Mr. Thorn had confessed to Dr. A——, that the only neighbours with whom he had associated of late, were distasteful to him by reason of their constant interference in his domestic troubles. Dr. A—— told him to make new neighbours, or, at all events, to have friends or relations constantly residing with him; and now, if he was not obliged to go home, to take a month's tour in the south of England.

Mr. Thorn went to the Isle of Wight. Staying at an hotel at Ryde, he dined at the *table d'hôte*, and there he met with an old acquaintance, Mrs. Anthony. Mrs. Anthony was Warwickshire born. Her maiden name was Johnson, and it was as Miss Johnson that she had in former years known Mr. Thorn. Her married life, as Mrs. Anthony, was a life of twenty years, not very happily spent, I believe, for temperance was not among the late Mr. Anthony's virtues. However, at her husband's decease, Mrs. Anthony found herself in comfortable circumstances. She was a good-humoured, sensible, straightforward woman, and by no means destitute of personal attractions. When she met Mr. Thorn at Ryde, she was accompanied by her mother, Mrs. Johnson. They were going, like Mr. Thorn, to make the tour of the Isle of Wight. However, instead of either party proceeding on the said tour, both parties lingered at Ryde. A sudden inspiration had seized Mr. Thorn, and he discovered that there was only one way of having a friend always resident in his house ; so, after a

week's courtship, Mr. Thorn and Mrs. Anthony became man and wife.

And here, though I am anticipating a little, I may state that Mr. Thorn soon discovered that the step which he had taken was a very wise one. The first thing Mrs. Thorn did, when she reached Fairbourne Hall, was to reconcile her husband and his nephew. She then cultivated the acquaintance of Miss Barnes and Mrs. Timmins in preference to that of some nearer neighbours. And somehow Mr. Thorn became a younger man again; rosy, and stout, and pleasant withal to look upon, though his hair *was* white. Mr. Thorn had always been accounted a shrewd man, and indeed that was his own idea of himself; but his marriage, when he was past sixty, was accounted by him ever afterwards as the great master-stroke of his life. As for Mrs. Thorn, we won't say that she was sentimentally attached to her second husband, but she did very much as she liked, and was well contented with her lot. She had at first some annoyances to contend with, as Mistress of Fair-

bourne Hall. Somehow or other, a great deal about the late Mr. Anthony was known in Fairbourne, almost as soon as Mrs. Thorn arrived there;—a great deal that was too true. And, with the truth, was intermixed a series of anecdotes about Mrs. Anthony, which were sufficiently calumnious and offensive, but had no foundation of truth whatever.

We must now say adieu to Fairbourne; for events at Castle Delamare are somewhat in arrear.

George Bentley, we have said, left the Castle and his two sisters on the twelfth of May. It was just a week later, when Sophia and Jane Bentley were daily expecting intelligence of their sister, that events occurred which, for the moment, diverted the thoughts of each into a different channel.

Lord Glenarvon came that morning to the Castle, really, not ostensibly, for a day's trout-fishing. Alice Chesney engaged Sophy to accompany his lordship, and Sophy, nothing loath, affected to make it a condition of her going that Alice should bring luncheon to the party at the

usual place,—viz. to a certain willow-tree at the bottom of the Park. Robert Chesney, accompanied by Jane, was going the same morning to try for a salmon at the *Lower Fall*, but they too engaged to join the luncheon-party at the well-known rendezvous. We will first follow Robert Chesney.

It was now after eleven o'clock. He had been fishing an hour under the Fall and had only met with disappointment. He had hooked a very fine fish, and it had broken loose. Jane's deep reverie, as she stood gazing into the sparkling eddies below the Fall, was interrupted by the well-known voice, close to her ear.—

“Jane dear, let us go lower and get away from the noise. We can converse then.”

And so they went downwards towards the sea, Robert Chesney trying each likely spot in the river as he passed along, while Jane, close at his left hand, talked fast and freely on many subjects, showing every now and then that she had learnt to appreciate a clever cast of the line, or to mark that peculiar whirl in the water which suggested

that an unseen fish, below the surface, had then and there inspected and refused the bait. There was nothing at this period of our history that Robert Chesney did, or said, or thought about, that escaped Jane's interested attention. To watch, to follow, to listen, to encourage, to imitate, and to worship, was the daily routine of which she never tired ; and which to him was an incense of still undiminished fragrance.

As, now, they spoke and walked, Jane observed that they were approached by a female figure, which seemed to have come from the wood behind them. The woman was neatly dressed in mourning and was closely veiled. Jane Bentley laid her hand on Robert Chesney's arm and drew his attention to the approaching figure. He stood still till the woman came up. "Sir Robert Chesney," said the woman, "I ask for a few words with you alone." The woman turned and had taken two steps in the direction of the wood, Robert Chesney preparing to follow her, when Jane Bentley broke in with—

"Do not go, Robert Chesney ! It is Sarah Dean."

"Yes, it is Sarah Dean," said the woman; "that is, I *was* Sarah Dean. I am Sarah Pugh now; but my husband is dead;" and the woman withdrew the veil from her face; Jane Bentley gazing at her, all the time, with apprehensive horror.

"And why should you wish an interview with me, Sarah Pugh?" said Robert Chesney.

"To serve you, Sir Robert, and to ease my own conscience."

"Then say what you have to say here," said Jane Bentley, "I will walk out of hearing."

"I will do your bidding, Miss Jane. Stay by Sir Robert, if you please, Ma'am. I wished to conceal nothing but myself. As I have not done that you are welcome to hear all I have to say."

There was something in Sarah Pugh's manner which reassured Jane Bentley; something too in the changed and haggard appearance of the pretty blooming girl she remembered as Sarah Dean which appealed to her charitable heart. Jane Bentley remained standing by Robert Chesney.

"Did I understand that Richard Pugh was dead,"

said Robert Chesney, "and that you are his widow ? "

"It is so, Sir Robert. I was married to Richard Pugh before I left the Castle ; before I went there. He promised to marry me if I obtained a situation at the Castle ; and, when I was hired, he kept his word."

"Is it prudent of you, Sarah Pugh, to appear in this neighbourhood ? *I* am not going to take any steps against you ; but do you know that that robbery was investigated by the constables ? "

"I have nothing to fear, Sir Robert, but the shame which has been mine for many a day. I do not fear any punishment in this world."

"Were you not concerned in that robbery, Sarah ? Appearances were against you."

"I tried to prevent it, Sir Robert. If Richard Pugh had not been my husband, I would have given him up. I have brought back all the money that was taken, Sir Robert. Here it is (handing a sealed packet). It is not the same money, but it is the sum that was taken. I have brought this also. It belongs to the owners of the Castle.

It was stolen by one of Richard Pugh's family from one of the Chesneys, many more than a hundred years ago. I got a priest to write down all that Richard Pugh ever told me or him about it, except what was said in confession. You will find the priest's account with the two other papers."

"Was the priest you speak of Curé of Morlaix?"

"Yes, Sir Robert: he was Richard Pugh's confessor."

"I did not know that Richard Pugh was a Catholic."

"He became one when he was on his death-bed, Sir Robert."

"Was it you, Sarah, who, sometime last month, took these papers to the curé and asked him to write to me about them?"

"Yes, Sir Robert. I acted under my husband's orders. He knew that he could not live, when he sent me to the curé. He wanted to sell the papers before he died: but he was dead before your answer reached the priest."

"If I recollect right, the curé stated that it was one of *your* ancestors from whom you had inherited the papers, Sarah. Was it so?"

"That was what my husband told me to say to the priest, Sir Robert. I knew it was not the truth; but my husband did not want his name to be mentioned, nor anything made known about him, to you."

"Did your husband then live at Morlaix, and under his own name?"

"No, Sir Robert! we lived under another name; but the priest knew my husband's real name."

"In the end of April last year, were you and your husband living at Morlaix?"

"I was there, Sir Robert. I went there with my husband soon after the robbery at the Castle. When my husband had got lodgings for me he went to sea again, and was away for a week or more, but I think he was back at Morlaix before the end of April."

"Do you know where he went to in that week, Sarah? Did he ever tell you?"

"He never would tell me; but I knew afterwards that it must have been then that he saw my mother. He went to Mynot, I suppose. He has never been there since, though he has been often away from Morlaix."

"Is your mother living at Mynot still, Sarah?"

"No, Sir, she is living at Milford. I came from Milford this morning, and I am going there again now."

"Then you have seen your mother since you landed. Did she say nothing to you about Richard Pugh's visit to Mynot, in April last year?"

"Yes, Sir Robert, she told me not to ask anything about it; nor to let any one here know who I was, or see my face."

"And yet you come to me, Sarah?"

"Yes, Sir Robert! My conscience sent me to you. I knew that you would not expose my shame, if I could see you by yourself."

"You need not fear *me*, poor girl!" said Jane Bentley. "I am very sorry for you. I will help you if you will tell me how?"

"Thank you, ma'am. I don't deserve kind words; but I am not past feeling them yet."

"Can't we do anything for you?" said Robert Chesney. "Take this money again. It is freely yours. One, two, of the papers which you have given me, I have no claim to. I will buy them from you with this money. You must surely need it."

"No! Sir Robert, I will not touch it. I am not in want, Sir Robert. I can take nothing from *you* except your forgiveness."

"You have it then, indeed, Sarah. Both Miss Bentley and I are truly sorry for you. But I don't see what there is to forgive, now that you have restored this money; I have only to thank you for the papers."

"Ah, Sir! there is much to forgive. I knew from the first that it was for no good that Richard Pugh wanted me to get a place at the Castle. I will tell you the whole truth about my marriage and the robbery. I would rather tell it. I may have a favour to ask of you some day, Sir Robert.

If I tell you the truth, I may then hope that that favour will be granted."

"I should like to hear your story, Sarah. It is connected with a subject in which I take much interest. When was it that you took service at the Castle? I forget."

"Mrs. Hughes hired me last February twelve-month, Sir, while my lady was away with you in Warwickshire. I was married in the same month, and I went to my situation in March. The robbery was on the night of the fifteenth of April. I have good reason to remember that night. When Richard Pugh told me that he should want my help for that night, he told me that he was going to search the north rooms; that he should get in by a way of his own, but that he should want me to let him out through Mr. Vaughan's room in the North-west Tower. I asked him what he wanted in the north rooms. He said, 'No harm! or I should not have asked you (meaning me, Sir,) to help me.' I was at home with my mother at the time, by Mrs. Hughes's permission. I was ill, and had asked for a holiday. I had no busi-

ness at the Castle on the night of the fifteenth. I told my husband so ; but he ordered me to go, and to hide myself, till the servants were gone to bed, and then to get the key of Mr. Vaughan's room and come and unlock the door, so as to let my husband out into the north court, and then take him through the house and let him out by the steward's entry. If I could not get the key, or if any of the servants saw me about, or if anything prevented my coming to the North-west Tower, I was to meet my husband half-an-hour later in my lady's flower-garden. I went to the Castle before sunset. I walked in, unobserved, by the steward's door, and hid myself in a lumber-room on the landing of the back staircase. I heard all the servants go to bed, and then I left my bonnet and shawl in the lumber-room and went down to the back-kitchen to warm myself. Mary Price saw me there, but took no notice. When I was sure that all was quiet, I went and unfastened the steward's entry, and I got the key of Mr. Vaughan's office out of Mrs. Hughes's room. I also got my bonnet and shawl down

from the lumber-room, and laid them handy to the steward's entry. It was not yet half-past eleven, the time at which I was to unlock Mr. Vaughan's door, so I sat down again by the fire in the back-kitchen. When I went and opened Mr. Vaughan's door, I found my husband was already in the office. He had a light, and I saw in a moment what he was doing. He was robbing Mr. Vaughan's cupboard. I went down on my knees to him, begging him to desist. He only threatened me. Then I tried to frighten him by telling him that Mary Price had been downstairs, and had seen me in the back-kitchen. This *did* frighten him, but, as I afterwards found, not in the way I wished. He told me to lock the door again, and be off as fast as I could to my lady's garden. He said he would get away by the same way that he came, and that he would meet me in the garden; that he would not venture to go through the house. I obeyed him. I locked the door and went. I reached the steward's entry; but while I was putting on my bonnet and shawl, I heard some one following me along the passage.

I went out at once through the steward's door, and shut it behind me. As I ran away, I heard it open again. I heard you call, Sir, and I heard you tell the dog to follow me ; but I was not afraid of the dog. He and I were friends. When I reached my lady's garden, I recollected that I had, in my hurry, brought away the key of Mr. Vaughan's room. I put it down on the grass-plot, where I was sure some one would see it. I had to wait many minutes before my husband came. I heard him at last, and joined him. We made for the park-wall, for a place where, with his help, I had got over often before. He told me the next day what he had done. He hid the money on the seashore under a stone, not long before the constables and you, Sir, came to search him. I was with him. I saw you coming, and I ran away. When the danger was over, I prayed my husband to take back the money. I will not tell you what he said, Sir, about you. It was too dreadful. I tried to persuade him to leave the country. We left the next day and sailed for France. I don't think my husband would have

left Mynot, but he was afraid of my betraying him in what he called my 'soft fits.' I have never been in Wales since, till yesterday."

"Thank you, Sarah," said Robert Chesney, "my own recollection convinces me of the truth of every word you have said. Now, can you tell me what your husband's original intention was in visiting Sir Arthur's Hall?"

"He never told me, Sir, exactly. I am afraid, Sir, that he had some design against you or the family. One of his excuses for taking the money was, that his taking it had saved your life. I know something of the story of that room, Sir, now. I am afraid my husband had some plot for drawing you there. He knew the story, and believed it all, Sir. He always said that he himself should come to a bad end for having gone back through Sir Arthur's Hall that night, because he read the scroll!"

"How did your husband come by his death?"

"He got hurt, Sir, in a brawl; but the doctor said it was his previous life that killed him. I fear he had led a very wicked life."

"Did he die penitent?" asked Jane Bentley.

"Yes, Ma'am; I trust so. The priest said so. My husband's last words to me were about an act of reparation which I have some day to do. But the time is not come yet."

"May you say what it is, Sarah?"

"You will learn it, Sir, from those papers. You will know it more perfectly when it is done. Never set foot in Sir Arthur's Hall, Sir: never let any of your family enter it, until you hear from me that it may be done safely."

You seem to have had a good education, Sarah. Pray, were you obliged to go into service at the time you came to the Castle?"

"No, Sir; far from it. I was obliged to marry Richard Pugh, Sir. That is part of my shame."

"Have you any child, then, living?" asked Robert Chesney.

"No, Sir! God be praised for taking my child." And the poor woman burst into tears; and Jane Bentley put her arm round her neck and tried to comfort her. Robert Chesney's lip quivered, and he turned away to hide something that fell on his cheek at that moment.

When the conference was resumed, Robert Chesney was the first to speak. "Are you sure that we can do nothing more for you, Sarah, than give you our sympathy, and protect you from observation? Are you really above the reach of want?"

"Quite above any need, Sir, except an indulgent consideration of my temptations, and how I was, by little and little, led into them. I and my mother have an independence of our own, Sir, and my husband left me with more; only I fear whether it was honestly come by, Sir."

"Will you promise to apply to me, Sarah, if you should ever be in need of any kind? Where shall you be living now?"

"With my mother, Sir. I shall apply to you some day, perhaps, for your countenance and aid. Give me some token whereby I can gain admission to your presence whenever I may need it. I would rather be known to *you* by a token than to others by telling who I am."

"I know not what to give you, Sarah, that I should recognise so immediately as you might

wish. I have nothing about me which seems suitable to the purpose. Can you remain here while I get a ring, or something of that kind, from the Castle?"

"I would rather not remain here any longer, Sir. Ask this lady, Sir, to give me one lock of her beautiful hair. I shall look at it and think of her; and when you see it again you will know it."

"Yes, Sarah! That will be well. It will be an emblem of goodness and sincerity that I shall never mistake. Jane, you will not object?"

"No, Robert Chesney! lend me the scissors out of your fly-book." And thus the compact was consecrated. Jane handed the token to Sarah Pugh, and said, "My best thoughts and most earnest prayers go with it, Mrs. Pugh."

And so Sarah Pugh veiled herself again and departed; and Robert Chesney and Jane Bentley thought much, and said little, for many minutes.

"I trust that poor girl may never hear of what happened a year ago, Jane."

"I trust not, Robert Chesney. She has suffered enough already."

And now it was past the time when the rendezvous at the willow-tree was to be observed; so the pair wended slowly up the bank of the Devi to the appointed place.

Reader, let us inquire what, meantime, befel Lord Glenarvon and Sophia Bentley in their fishing excursion that same morning.

The Earl had laboured for nearly an hour to no purpose, when the water became suddenly strewn with myriads of some particular ephemeral, for which it would seem that the capricious trout of the Devi had been waiting. The river was alive in an instant. Lord Glenarvon had already landed three fine fish on a shelving bank without the aid of Sophy, and had hooked a fourth. This fish was in the very finest season, and consequently more lively than the others. Sophy tendered her assistance, and, just as the fish was being drawn ashore, she managed, very adroitly, to push the landing-net against the creature's nose and so release it from further coercion. This was an old trick of Miss Sophy's, often practised on her brother George, and on

Sir Walter Lloyd ; but Lord Glenarvon was not aware of her propensity to rescue the Devi trout, so he laughingly excused what he supposed to be her want of skill. Continued success compensated the Earl for his patience, and fish after fish was drawn to land. Sophy, indignant at the carnage, now thought of another stratagem to aid the trout. " Oh, Lord Glenarvon, how fast the trout *are* rising ! I do think I could catch one myself this morning. I should so like to try."

Of course, the Earl's rod was instantly handed to Miss Sophy, who, wielding it with both hands, began to lash the stream amain. After a few cast, perfectly innocuous to the trout, Miss Sophy was seen shading her eyes with her hand and looking curiously into the top of an alder-tree which branched out overhead. " Dear me ! how provoking ! Look, Lord Glenarvon ! The flies have hooked themselves into that bough. Do you think you can get them down ?"

With patient dexterity, and by the aid of that handy little implement known to the inexpert

and the unfortunate as "the fisherman's friend," Lord Glenarvon succeeded in cutting the offending bough from the parent tree, and bringing it to the ground. The flies were then disentangled, and the rod was available for further use. Lord Glenarvon handed it to Sophy, at the same time recommending her to walk on a little further and try the stream where it was more open. Sophy declining, Lord Glenarvon resumed his efforts; but ten minutes of precious time had been lost, the flies had vanished from the water, and the Devi trout were again asleep. Vainly did his lordship try to awaken them. As he sauntered on down the stream, Sophy, lending his efforts an occasional and distant glance, a glance of curiosity rather than sympathy,—Sophy, I say, was seated under the afore-mentioned alder-tree, and was reading in a pocket-edition one of Shakespeare's Plays.

"Good morning, Miss Bentley, I have found you at last," said a cheerful voice, coming from the direction opposite to that in which Lord Glenarvon had passed. Sophy started,—

Sir Walter Little
 aware of her presence
 so he laughingly
 her want of skill
 sated the Earl for
 was drawn to the
 carnage, now the
 aid the trout. "The
 the trout *are* rising
 one myself this morn-
 try."

Of course, the Earl
 to Miss Sophy, who
 began to lash the
 cast, perfectly innocent
 was seen shading his
 looking curiously into
 which branched out
 provoking! Look, I
 have hooked themselves
 you think you can get

With patient dexterity
 handy little implements

business. Chesney knew that I should be here soon as I could leave London."

"Did he? Then he kept it a secret from all us."

"No, not from all, Miss Bentley. Alice expected me yesterday, I find. I hope you can sort well of all at the Grange."

"Yes; very well now, Mr. Verriker. Perhaps I have heard of Edmund's late troubles. They are over now, the worst of them."

"Alice has been telling me of them as we walked along. Your brother has been nobly supported, Miss Bentley; but not more nobly than he and his family deserve. For my part, I rejoice more at the honour that has been done, than I grieve for his losses. You were thinking 'Othello,' I think, Miss Bentley, when I interrupted you. You remember how a 'good name' is estimated by Shakespeare?"

Yes, by Shakespeare; not by Iago. Why should Shakespeare make Iago say it? I must ask you about that."

And is Miss Jane really so lively and

happy as Alice represents her to be, Miss Bentley?"

"Jane is always what she seems to be, Mr. Verriker. You will see her and judge for yourself soon; or, if you like, you can ask her whether she is happy. She will tell you, no doubt. I should like to be by when you ask Jane that. Dear Jane!"

"Should you like to be asked the same question yourself, Miss Bentley?"

"I should not mind at all. Yes, I am very happy. Mr. Chesney and Jane are more than two miles away from hence, Mr. Verriker. Shall I show you where to find them? Lord Glenarvon can spare me very well, I think. I only hinder his sport. I hinder him on purpose, Mr. Verriker; but he takes it so good-humouredly that I am almost sorry to have been so treacherous."

"He has just hooked a fish, I see. A good one, I should think, by the pains he is taking over it. I must have a turn on this river myself to-morrow. Will you come and show me the good places, Miss Sophy?"

"If I come with you, Mr. Verriker, you won't catch a single fish. I can promise you that—at least if you leave me to land them."

"I will accept the penalty, whatever it be, Miss Bentley. You promise, then, to accompany me?"

"Yes; if you promise to keep your temper, Mr. Verriker."

"If I lose it, you will easily restore it, Miss Bentley."

"Oh, I should not try, Mr. Verriker. I should run away at the first symptom of discontent on your part."

"Very hard, Miss Bentley, to deny one a chance of recovery."

"I give you a fair warning instead, Mr. Verriker."

"Ah! then I'll take the warning, Miss Bentley. It is not the first warning I have to thank you for."

"How so, Mr. Verriker? I don't remember."

"But I do, Miss Bentley. I will show you how well, by repeating your exact words. They were these,—*'God bless you, Mr. Verriker. You*

spoke of time. Remember that time is a precious gift ; a test of more things than one.' You see, Miss Bentley, I have not forgotten your last words. It has been a priceless treasure to me, the recollection that you had expressed an interest in my welfare, the thought that I had left England with your blessing. Will you encourage and bless me still, Sophy?—encourage all my best thoughts and hopes,—bless all my future life?"

"I will pray that I may be able to do so, Mr. Verriker."

"Thank you, dearest Sophy. How generously, how nobly you have treated me!"

"Say rather how well placed have my trust and affection been, Mr. Verriker; and not only mine but dear Jane's also."

"May God's blessing ever attend Jane Bentley for the way she has befriended me. No other woman in broad England would have acted as she has."

"No, Mr. Verriker; there are not two Janes."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN one o'clock came, Miss Chesney was duly prepared to do the honours of a luncheon, outspread under the great willow-tree.

Lord Glenarvon appeared first at the place of rendezvous, and significantly explained to Alice how he had been deserted by his fair companion. Mr. Verriker and Sophia soon followed; Robert Chesney and Jane came last. Mr. Verriker was first introduced to Lord Glenarvon; and, when Robert Chesney and Jane appeared, he hastened to meet them. The meeting was very cordial on both sides, and Sophy observed that Mr. Verriker kept hold of dear Jane's hand for at least half a

minute, and Jane very soon perceived that Mr. Verriker and Sophy had been exchanging something more than warm salutations. Altogether it may be said that Lord Glenarvon, Alice Chesney, and Jane Bentley, usually so composed, so reserved, were on this occasion the liveliest of the party; and *vice versa*, Mr. Verriker and Sophia, heretofore so gay, had become reflective.

After luncheon, when the servants appeared to carry away the relics of the feast, Robert Chesney handed his rod and fishing-tackle to Mr. Verriker, and asked Sophia to show Mr. Verriker the way to the Lower Fall, and wished them better success than he himself had met with.

Mr. Verriker promptly acquiesced in the proposal, and Sophy blushed very prettily, and followed Mr. Verriker like a lamb.

Robert Chesney went off to the Castle, attended as usual by Jane. He was going to peruse the manuscripts which Sarah Pugh had given him.

Lord Glenarvon and Miss Chesney still stood under the willow-tree, while the servants collected the luncheon things.

"Do you intend to fish any more to-day, Glenarvon?" said Alice Chesney.

"I do not much care what I do," was the answer; but it was accompanied with a pleading look which told a different tale.

Had Lord Glenarvon said, "Yes, if you will accompany me," Miss Chesney would have probably made some imperial allegation of duties elsewhere; but pleading looks always softened Miss Chesney's heart. Moreover, Lord Glenarvon was at this time regarded by Miss Chesney with most gracious favour. He had been one of her instruments in the late piece of diplomacy in favour of Edmund Bentley. It was not Lord Glenarvon's generosity which had won so much way with Alice; it was rather the hearty good-will and thoughtful tact with which he had aided to carry out her sovereign will. So now, with a smile, rather triumphant than gracious, Alice seizes Lord Glenarvon's fishing-rod, and marshals him on the way towards the Upper Fall.

"Thank you, dear Alice," said the Earl, overtaking her, "this is very kind of you, especially

as I know that you dislike fishing. I do not intend to fish so long as you remain with me."

"I am going to walk with you to the Upper Fall, Francis. Most likely I shall leave you there. You can then fish as much as you please."

"I shall prefer following you onwards, if you permit it, Alice."

"Well, we shall see. I am going a little beyond the Fall to visit a sick child. I shan't take you with me to the cottage, but perhaps I may return to the Fall afterwards, and ask you to accompany me home."

"Ask me, Alice? What severe irony!"

"Order you, then, if you prefer being ordered."

"I think I do rather prefer it. You reward obedience so much better than mere acquiescence."

"Ay, out that is only when I tell you to do something which you don't like."

"I don't remember a case in point; not of late, at least, Alice."

"I am afraid I have been rather too indulgent of late, but I must not let my weapons rust too

long. Suppose now, Francis, that I am tired, or choose to say so, and ask you to take this jelly to the cottage beyond the Fall, while I remain here. Should you do it?"

"Undoubtedly I should, Alice?"

"Without complaining or looking mortified?"

"Yes; without either."

"Without even thinking me arbitrary, Francis?"

"I might think you somewhat unfeeling, but I should not show it."

"And it would be *very* unfeeling, and I am not going to do it. There! I will try to make you as happy as I suspect Sophy is making Mr. Verriker. Give me your arm, Francis, up this hill."

"Is there an engagement between Sophy and Mr. Verriker?"

"One of about two hours' standing, I fancy," said Alice.

They had by this time reached the top of the hill, which, though short, was very steep. Alice released Lord Glenarvon's arm, and, stopping to recover her breath, turned to look backwards on

a well-known view down the valley of the Devi. Lord Glenarvon turned, too. As they gazed his hand fell lightly on Alice's waist, and rested there unproved.

It was a very exceptional movement, was this of Lord Glenarvon, but, as I have hinted above, he was at this time in an exceptional state of favour, and ventured on the experiment. He talked fast all the time, as if unconscious of what else he was doing.

"And how in the world do you calculate that, Alice? Even if Mr. Verriker told you that he was going to propose, how do you know that he is accepted?"

"He never told me anything of the kind. When he came to the Castle he asked to see Robert. Robert was out fishing, so it was arranged that I should take Mr. Verriker to look for some of the anglers. As long as I remained with him, he thought we were looking for Robert, but of course I guessed whom he most wanted to see, and took care that he should find, not Robert, but Sophy."

"Well, but how do you know what passed between them? I am sure you had no confidential communications with either of them at or after luncheon."

"How do you know that, Francis?"

"Because I was watching you. You know I always watch you."

"Yes, Francis, and I don't always approve of it, remember. But do you really mean to tell me that you could not see there was something between Mr. Verriker and Sophy? Men are so blind in such matters!"

At this moment there was a man within a few paces of the happy pair who was not so very blind. They were startled by a footstep. They turned. Close behind them was Sir Robert Chesney!

Alice Chesney's engagement was discovered by her father! She knew it in a moment. Her presence of mind forsook her; and, by the endeavour to hide her blushes, she made detection more complete. She turned from Lord Glenarvon and passed her father without speaking a word.

Sir Robert smiled very, very complacently, with "Charming day, dear!" to Alice, and walked up to Lord Glenarvon.

"Ah, the loveliest of all our home views, Glenarvon! No wonder you and Alice turned to look at it. I often come here on purpose to look at it. But I see it is a little hazy to-day."

"Beautiful view, Sir Robert. Yes, extremely beautiful,—pretty, in fact!"

Poor Lord Glenarvon!—he had committed himself by his anticlimax as completely as if he had been silent. Sir Robert Chesney smiled again and passed on homewards. Lord Glenarvon rejoined Alice Chesney.

"I am so sorry, Alice. I fear you are dreadfully annoyed."

"Yes, indeed, I am; but it cannot be avoided now. Give me your arm again, Francis."

"How good of you not to be blaming me. I really think I deserve it."

"I should be very unjust if I blamed you in the least. The imprudence, such as it was, was mine."

"But I ought to have guarded you from it, not taken advantage of your kind feeling at the moment."

"No, Francis, I cannot admit that. You have shown too constant a respect for my wishes to allow of my blaming you when you were not *disrespecting* them. Had the thing happened in another way and by your fault, I don't think I could have forgiven you; but happening as it has, I will only take care that it does not prejudice you;—not in my affection, at least."

"I trust your father will say nothing that will grieve you, my love, my queen. I cannot bear the thought of your being in any way humiliated. Would you not wish me to speak to Sir Robert on the subject, Alice?"

"No. Leave that to me. I shall never hear an inconsiderate or unkind word from my father. Of that you may be quite sure. You will see nothing in his face or manner but increased happiness and satisfaction. He knows now that we are engaged, and that will content him. If he had set his heart on such a thing and had not

been assured of it, it might have made him uneasy; but now he will be very much inclined, I fancy, to let things take their own course."

"And that course is to be what you determined before, is it, Alice?"

"Yes; our understanding must be the same."

We need not follow Lord Glenarvon and Miss Chesney any further. Suffice it to say that it was mutually agreed that, whether their engagement became known or not, they were not to marry during Sir Robert Chesney's lifetime, unless Robert Chesney, the younger, married, which they both knew he was unlikely to do.

Meantime, Robert Chesney sat in his study diligently perusing the manuscripts given him by Sarah Pugh. Jane Bentley sat with him; reading and working by turns, looking towards him occasionally with that quiet devotional look of hers, but wondering, nevertheless, that he should be so absorbed in those manuscripts. For some reason or other, Robert Chesney never said anything to Jane with reference to the current of his ideas, but when he had finished his

researches and had locked the manuscripts up, he said,—

“Jane dear, I am afraid that I am becoming quite superstitious. That whole subject of Sir Arthur’s Hall and the ‘Chesney curse,’ as I see it was called, interests and impresses me in an extraordinary way. There are one or two points which puzzle me yet; but really I begin to fear to talk of them. One thing is clear, that that room must be kept closed against all further investigation.”

“I quite agree with you, Robert Chesney. The rooms are not wanted. Why should you wish to interfere further in a subject which, from all we know, is dangerous, to say the least of it? It is hurtful to put yourself in the way of doubts and apprehensions, unless you can first decide that they are groundless and will not affect you again at another time. I am not superstitious, but yet I could not withstand a great fear that came over me that day, lest Sophy should have incurred any peril by going into the further rooms.”

"Your fear is over now, I trust. I can tell you, from what I have just now been reading, that there is no hint of a prohibition as to what Sophy did. And talking of Sophy, dear Jane, I hope you are pleased, altogether pleased, with the present prospect."

"Yes, indeed, Robert Chesney. How dear Sophy is to be admired for the way she has kept her heart from ranging where I well believe it was prone to go last year. Once gone, Sophy's heart is gone for ever. It has gone now. God grant that it has gone where its matchless worth will be appreciated ! I imagine that, of course, Mr. Verriker has not spoken to Sophy without consulting his father."

"No, Jane ! Verriker would be the last man to gain a promise under any false pretence or by any concealment. He knows your view and mine on that subject. You may be sure that it has been his also."

"Yes ! I ought to know that of him, now."

And, reader, let us descend for a minute to the Lower Fall and take one peep at Mr. Verri-

ker's performance as an angler. Oh ! I see the salmon may rest for Mr. Verriker. As regards salmon-fishing he is a mere impostor ; he isn't even trying to fish. There those two are, sitting side by side, on a grassy bank near the fall, very intent on something, no doubt, but not on salmon. I suppose the noise of the waterfall makes it difficult for one to hear what the other says, and that that is the reason they keep their heads so near together.

And Sophy looks at her watch and says ' it is half-past six, and time to dress for dinner.'

" And where did that watch come from, Sophy ? You had it not, last year. Really it *is* a gem."

" Sir Robert gave it to me, Mr. Verriker. I always wear it when I am here."

" And that locket, which is attached to it, Sophy ; whence came that ?"

" Really you are very inquisitive, Sir. Am I to tell you all my secrets in one day ? Sir Walter gave me that ; if you must know everything."

"Oh ! Sir Walter ! I thought it was the fashion to return that kind of offering now-a-days, Sophy."

"And vex dear, kind Sir Walter ! No ! Mr. Verriker ; not even to please you."

"That is right, Sophy. Pray, does the locket contain a portion of Sir Walter's hair ?"

"Of course it does, Sir ; and I mean to keep it."

"Quite right, Sophy ! I am not of a jealous disposition."

"No, Sir ; I hope not. But I see that you are only joking. Let us hasten on. Sir Robert likes every one to be punctual."

On the following day, Sir Walter Lloyd came unexpectedly to fish in the Devi. Jane Bentley was sadly disconcerted. She went to Mr. Verriker and told him much that he knew before about Sir Walter, and begged him to let Sophy go out fishing, as usual, with Sir Walter. "You know, of course, Mr. Verriker, that Sophy would rather keep her promise to you, and will do so if you require it. But Sophy is very tender-

hearted, Mr. Verriker; she cannot bear to see any one whom she likes annoyed. You had better give up Sophy for to-day. She will duly appreciate your unselfishness."

"I will do anything you wish, Miss Jane; with a willing and obedient heart too. Will you take Sophy's place and come fishing with me?"

"Oh! yes, Mr. Verriker, if you wish it. I shall like it very much. But I shall hardly be able to start for the next half-hour, till the post has come in."

The post came in and brought a letter from Gossett Grange. Sophy and Jane now belonged to a former generation. Their niece and its mother were going on well. And, after this letter had been answered, the day's fishing went off according to Jane's programme; only Alice Chesney accompanied Lord Glenarvon throughout the day; and Robert Chesney was busy on his farm.

The next day was spent by the whole party from the Castle at Capel Park. Even Sir Robert Chesney went to Capel Park; out of *respect*, as he

said, to Lady Glenarvon ; with whom, no doubt, he had some interesting conversation on matters in which both were much inclined to communicate. The others went angling in the Capel Brook, where the trout-fishing was a pleasing variety on that of the Devi, the fish being larger and more pink than any in South Wales, but not quite so numerous as in the Devi. The reader will guess how the six anglers paired off ; and will guess rightly, if he or she supposes that Robert Chesney and Jane had the best success. The details need not be given.

When the party reassembled before dinner at Capel, Robert Chesney said to Lord Glenarvon,—

“ That is a magnificent water for the growth of fish, Glenarvon. Pray, has the brook any other name but that of the Capel Brook ? ”

“ It is called the Capel Brook here ; and the Nanclin Brook, up above ; and the Combe Brook, above that. It seems to change its name as it flows,” said Lord Glenarvon.

“ And you never heard any name for the whole river, Glenarvon ? ”

"No! I don't suppose it has any general name, Chesney."

"It must have had, some time or other," said Robert Chesney, "but I dare say the original name is lost. The old names of streams and rivers are curious, Glenarvon, in any country. They are usually the oldest words traceable in the language of that country. When you and I were in Italy together, we did not know that the old name of the Tiber was the Rumon; and that Rome itself took its name from the older name of the river on which it was founded."

"No, Chesney, I did not know it then, nor should I have learned it since, except from you. How in the world do you find time to explore such subjects? Some one told me that you sit up reading half the night. Is that a true bill, Chesney?"

"No! A libel, Glenarvon! I manage to get too well tired on my farm, during the day, to afford much appetite for the midnight lamp. Moreover, the hours of all of us at the Castle are regulated by the supreme authority of the ladies.

When ladies, such ladies as we serve, Glenarvon, make rules and ordinances, he is a bold man who would infringe them."

"What is that, Robert?" said Alice Chesney.

"What did I hear you say?"

"I was expressing my allegiance, Alice, to lawful authority—that was all," said Robert Chesney.

"And giving me some wholesome advice, Miss Chesney," said Lord Glenarvon.

"Yes!" said Alice, "I can guess the kind of advice you two give to each other. Glenarvon, come and sit here by me; and, Robert, go and sit by Jane."

"I am glad that Alice recognises her future position at Capel," whispered Lord Glenarvon to Robert Chesney, as they parted in obedience to Alice's commands.

"What did you whisper to Robert?" said Alice to Lord Glenarvon. "I insist upon knowing."

Lord Glenarvon confessed. Alice only blushed and laughed. Except when stirred by anything like opposition, Alice Chesney was the gentlest of women.

The second day after the visit to Capel Park was Sunday. Sir Robert Chesney, not feeling very well, did not accompany the rest of his family and his guests to morning service at Llandevi church. It was a rare omission for him to make, and Alice Chesney felt anxious. When she got back to the Castle her anxiety was turned into alarm. Sir Robert had had a fit, so Davis said, and had been found helplessly lying in his arm-chair. Davis and another servant had got him to bed as quickly as possible. Robert Chesney and Alice now flew to his room.

"Our father has had a paralytic stroke," said Robert Chesney to his sister; "but don't be alarmed, dear; it is not a severe one, so far as I can judge."

There was no person living who could remember Sir Robert Chesney having any illness, such as to confine him to his room for a single day. He had himself no remembrance of such an attack; and therefore the mere fact of his present seizure was enough to startle all who knew him best. The general anxiety was soon allayed by

the arrival of a surgeon from H——, a gentleman who had the empty title of medical attendant at the Castle, and who had for twenty years past been in the receipt of a gratuity of twenty guineas per annum from Sir Robert. This was an acknowledgment which Sir Robert considered to be due to Mr. Evans's readiness to attend when required, and willingness to stay away until he was sent for.

Mr. Evans then, arriving at the Castle, soon dispensed consolation to the whole establishment. Sir Robert had had a *stroke*, a very slight one. It only affected his left side, and that in no formidable way. His sight, speech, and other faculties were uninjured. With careful nursing he would be well in a fortnight, if he would comply with Mr. Evans's directions. We need not say that these conditions of recovery were steadily kept in sight, not only by Alice Chesney, but by Jane Bentley, who cheerfully returned to her old vocation of nurse, and relieved Alice of more than half her anxieties.

On the third day after Sir Robert's seizure, Dr.

Hawkes, a physician from Bristol, came to see him. This was by Mr. Vaughan's request and arrangement, Dr. Hawkes being a private friend of Mr. Vaughan, and the nearest physician of established eminence. Dr. Hawkes endorsed all Mr. Evans's opinions and suggestions. He spoke, however, to Robert Chesney and Alice with some misgiving as to the future. They must consider their father liable to a second attack; specially liable when his age and languid circulation were taken into the question. The things which were most to be guarded against were, a too abstemious diet, exposure to cold, and anxiety of mind. If Sir Robert could be shielded from those three predisposing causes, it was probable that, with his fine constitution, he might avoid a second attack altogether, and live and enjoy life for years to come.

Dr. Hawkes was no doubt quite candid and correct in all he said; but there was one contingency which he did not foretel, and which neither physician nor nurse can guard against. Sir Robert Chesney, though endowed with a

temper the most placid and a disposition the most benign, had been too unused to confinement to bear it with perfect equanimity. Though he was regaining his strength fast, and though his faculties were undisturbed by his late attack, his nurses allowed no corresponding move in the direction of personal liberty. So Sir Robert, as he got better, got also restless and, for him, somewhat irritable. It was a week after his seizure, and on a Sunday, that the first phase of this inquietude became palpable. Robert Chesney had stayed away from afternoon service to read to his father ; but the book was laid on one side, and Sir Robert began to speak of himself, and of his affairs. He could not, he said, overlook the warning which he had received, or accept it as aught else than a warning. He had settled all his worldly affairs long since, and had no desire now to effect any important change. He wished to make a codicil to his will, in order to add a few legacies, of which he knew that his son would approve,—tokens of his love and gratitude to friends whom he had met with later

in life, and since his will was made. Cousin Vaughan would see to the preparation of that codicil on the morrow. And then Sir Robert recurred to the only unfulfilled wish of his heart and besought his son to gratify it without delay. "Robert," said the old man, "it is a subject on which I have long forborne to advise or urge you, deeming that all would be well, and that my hopes were yours also. But tell me, Robert, have you and Jane fixed yet on the time when you will make yourselves and me happy?" Robert Chesney's frame shook as with convulsive pain; but he collected himself and answered,—

"Father! we have fixed nothing. Surely there is no need of haste in the matter of my marrying. I have not urged it upon Jane. I have reason to think that my doing so now would cause her the greatest anxiety and distress. I love Jane with all my heart, Father; love her too well to think of grieving her. I should break a promise if I urged her, Father. I wish to be patient, and to wait for whatever Jane may judge to be best. I will solemnly promise you

never to marry another, Father. Will not that suffice ?”

“ You promise me what I do not ask or wish, Robert. Tell me candidly your thoughts. Do you think that Jane’s hesitation is only temporary or permanent ?”

“ Father, I trust to remove it some day, without grieving Jane. If that hope should fail, I will never marry.”

“ May I speak to Jane on the subject myself, Robert ?”

“ You must not, Father. If you love Jane or me, you must not ; unless—unless you feel that this subject weighs on your mind so as to retard your recovery.”

“ No, Robert ; I must set aside my own selfish wish, now that I see what pain it would cause to urge it. Robert, answer me another question. If Alice were to marry, and her children of another name were expecting to take this inheritance ; if you saw yourself to be the last of the Chesneys, would you regret it very much ?”

“ I should regret it very little, father ; far

less than I now regret disappointing your wishes."

The party from the Castle had by this time returned from Church. Jane Bentley, in her bonnet, was the first to come and inquire after Sir Robert. She saw him lying in a state of apparent meditation. She marked the troubled expression of Robert Chesney's face. She turned and left the room. The old man resumed the conversation,—

"That was Jane, I think. No, Robert! I must never speak to Jane on that subject. I should fear to do it after what you have said. My blessing be with Jane for evermore. Tell me, Robert, if what I have thought of will meet your views? Shall you think me unjust or mistrustful if I entail this estate?"

"How would you entail it, Father? No doubt I shall acquiesce in your plan."

"On you, Robert, your eldest son, or your eldest daughter, if you have no son. Then on Alice and her second son; provided always that every successor shall retain or take the name of Chesney."

"Yes, Father ; that would have my cordial consent."

"That shall be done then, Robert. Tell Cousin Vaughan that I wish to speak to him, Robert ; that I have further instructions for him to undertake to-morrow."

Mr. Vaughan came and took Sir Robert's commission, viz. to instruct Messrs. Hollins (Sir Robert's London solicitors) to prepare the entail above indicated, without delay. The entail was to confirm, except as regarded the real property now to be re-settled, Sir Robert's previous will and a supplementary codicil, which said codicil would be executed on the morrow. Mr. Vaughan, now that he and Sir Robert were conversing on business, took occasion to make a confidential communication on his own account, viz. that he (Mr. Vaughan) had left the bulk of his own property to Miss Chesney for her life, and afterwards to her younger children, if she should have such.

We need not repeat all the conversation that followed. It was more than was prudent for Sir Robert to undertake. He had not a good night

after it; and, on the next day, though he ought to have had entire rest, he insisted on a special conference with his daughter. Alice Chesney, half divining the subject which was to be discussed, obeyed her father's summons.

The reader must not suppose that Miss Chesney's demeanour towards Lord Glenarvon was the type of her demeanour towards any other person or persons. With her father she was all affection and submission,—never attempting to carry a point of her own, except by coaxing and endearment. It needs not that we should record what passed between Sir Robert and his daughter on this occasion. The result of their conference will appear in a dialogue which took place immediately afterwards between Robert Chesney and Jane Bentley.

“Jane dear, though my sister's engagement has not been declared, I suppose you are aware of its existence.”

“Yes, Robert Chesney, Alice herself has spoken of it frequently to me; but I knew that she did not wish it to be talked about. It is a subject

on which Alice disallows or evades all interference."

" Well, Jane, your interference is asked now ; and I am commissioned to ask it. I only trust that my petition may be possible for you to grant. Do not look distressed, dear Jane, I am not going to re-open a forbidden subject. You must know, then, that, hitherto, Alice's resolution has been not to marry during our father's lifetime, unless my previous marriage should have provided a mistress for this house, and so released her from what she considers her paramount duty. You also know, Jane, that, with me, marriage is out of the question. I have been obliged to tell my father so. The consequence is, that, without reproaching me for disobedience, he has been trying to obtain a promise from Alice that, directly he leaves his room, she will marry Lord Glenarvon. There is only one person in the world that Alice would yield to on such a subject, and that is my father. I believe she tried to wheedle him out of his attempt to extract a promise from her ; and that in the course of their conversation, my father

argued that 'now that Jane would be always at the Castle, Alice lost her only plea, that which obliged *her* to be here.' In short, my father met Alice's coaxing by telling her very pleasantly that now he had adopted a second daughter, he should always be sure of the society of one daughter, even if Alice were married. Alice, at last, was obliged to surrender, on the best terms she could secure. She has agreed to my father's wishes on two conditions: first, that, as Lady Glenarvon, she shall be resident at the Castle as often and as much as she thinks proper; secondly, that we are to get a promise from you, Jane, that, whenever Alice is away, you will be here to take care of my father."

"And do you think, Robert Chesney, that, all circumstances considered, I should be right in giving such a promise?"

"Yes I do, Jane. You are thinking of your possible duties at home interfering with such a promise. I can qualify your doubts on that score, I trust. Your brother Edmund is always welcome here, your Aunt also is welcome, and, in

short, all whom you love. And then there is the probability of George's settling in this neighbourhood. I may tell you the secret. Glenarvon, as soon as George's education is complete, will make him his agent; and there is a prospect of his having our agency as well, for Mr. Vaughan talks of resigning. These offers will not be made to George in the first instance. If Edmund prefers to give up the Grange to George, and to come here himself, he is to have the preference. Now, Jane, I think you cannot hesitate, on the score of duty to your family, to accede to our request. I need not tell you, dear Jane, how fervently my own hopes expect a favourable decision."

"You know, Robert Chesney, that you can ask me nothing which I can hesitate to give. You bind me now by further feelings of the deepest gratitude."

"Thank you, dearest Jane, I may report your promise then to my father as given."

"Given, so long as he and Alice wish it to hold good. Yes, and given with many thanks

for such a proof of their esteem. But before you go, Robert Chesney, tell me, is not Lord Glenarvon necessarily a party to some of these arrangements, before they can be considered final; the time of his own marriage, the future residence of his wife? Surely, Robert Chesney!"

"Well, it would seem reasonable, dear Jane, to reasonable people like you and me; but that is my imperious sister's affair. You may depend upon it, Jane, that Glenarvon won't be consulted, either before his marriage or after. He has seen the last of his own will and pleasure, unless he can make it Alice's. His mother follows him, or rather preceded him, in the same worship of Alice; so that his last chance of independence is gone. It is his own doing. I am not allowing that I regret it all, either on his account or hers. With Alice's good sense, high principles, undoubted love, and everlasting constancy, I have no fear of less than a good result."

"Has Lord Glenarvon many faults, Robert Chesney? You said 'it was his own doing.' What did you mean by that?"

"He is inordinately proud, Jane. He has now made Alice's pride his own. When he found that he could not control it, he worshipped and encouraged it. That is how he achieved his own bondage."

"Has he any other faults, Robert Chesney?"

"A hasty temper; some bitterness of disposition; a tendency to sarcasm; things which all go to make a man unpopular. And Glenarvon is unpopular, except with those who know him well."

"Is he a religious man, Robert Chesney?"

"I cannot answer that question. I never saw anything in him which inclined to irreverence. He is so undemonstrative as regards feelings, that I don't see how one can judge. Do you think Alice will be happy, Jane?"

"Yes! and Lord Glenarvon too. His faults are just those which she is fitted to rectify. You know, Robert Chesney, how very highly I respect Alice. She is fitted for dominion; and I rejoice that it will be hers."

Three days after this, Sir Robert Chesney was

able to leave his room, and everything was being settled for Lord Glenarvon's wedding. It was to take place at Llandeви Church on the 15th of June.

In the interval, there were of course daily and constant communications between Castle Delamare and Capel Park. Among things, not very relevant, it would seem, to the approaching occasion, Robert Chesney received the following note:—

June 5th, 18—.

DEAR CHESNEY,—Will you and Verriker, with any of the ladies, who may feel inclined, come and fish here on Monday, staying dinner of course? My mother has a cold, or she would have driven over to-day to ask you. We hope Sir Robert is still improving. Should this find you by the river or in the field, a verbal answer will suffice.

Yours sincerely,

GLENARVON.

The fishing continues quite worthy of your skill. By the way, I misinformed you about the

name of the stream here. When you asked me the question, I was not aware that it had any general name. In an old map of the estate which I happened to be looking at yesterday, I find it marked *Dulas flow*. Mother says that when she came here, as a bride, it was commonly called *The Dulas* : but that my father altered the name.

CHAPTER IX.

Castle Delamare,

June 22nd, 18—.

DEAREST EDMUND AND LUCY,—I will not suppose that dear, methodical Jane omitted to tell you, in her last, a single circumstance of the gay wedding; no! not gay, but very impressive and solemn, as weddings ought to be.

Perhaps Jane forgot to tell you how nice, and beautiful, and calm she looked herself. Alice, too, was very sustained and dignified, till the time when she and Jane said good-bye to each other, and then they both broke down. I was glad to see it, because all of us had given way, more or less, before; and it was comforting to see that we were not exceptions to the philo-

sophical standard set up by the bride and her chief bridesmaid.

You know that dear Jane is first in all my thoughts ; so I must tell you all about her, before I go on to other subjects. The day Alice went, Sir Robert took dear Jane in to dinner and made her sit at the top of the table and then sat by her himself. Sir Robert, you know, always took the bottom of his table till Alice married ; and now Mr. Chesney takes Sir Robert's place, and Sir Robert sits by Jane. And dear Jane looks so well fitted to her new place, at the top of the table ! I wish Aunt could only see her for a minute. Aunt would never forget that minute.

Dear Jane seems very happy now ; I can't quite understand how she is so happy, but then, you know, Jane and I never could understand each other ; though we never have disagreed. And Lucy, I must now give you a little scolding for not writing oftener to tell us about baby and yourself. Edmund is very stupid in his letters. He never tells us anything about his niece : he shows a

great want of proper pride on the subject; so Jane and I think.

Tell dear Aunt that I will remember all her admonitions; but we are not going to winter abroad. Mr. Verriker says that both he and I shall prefer returning to England before September. I did not tell him that I wished it. I am so glad he prefers it. He left the Castle on Thursday last. I expect him back on Thursday or Friday next. He says Friday, and possibly Thursday. I know he will come on Thursday if he can; but, of course, business must be attended to. I suppose the day will be fixed when Mr. Verriker comes back. Sir Robert and he will settle it all. Sir Robert won't allow me to have a word in the matter. He says I am to leave everything to him and Mr. Verriker, and dear Jane. My only stipulation is that it must be at a time when both you, Edmund, and George can be here; Aunt too, if she can manage it. I should so like to have dear Aunt at my wedding.

Mr. Verriker tells me in his letter of this morning (Saturday, I mean; I got it this morn-

ing) that he has been looking at a house at Twickenham, which, as long as he is in business, is the utmost of a country-house that he can allow. I can have all my pets there, and plenty of room for more ; so he says ; but I fear he has forgotten the bees. I don't think the bees can thrive so near London. I shall leave mine at the Grange, under Edmund's care. Mr. Verriker has been making me such beautiful presents ; and I fear there will be more on Thursday. It is half my care to convince him how contented I am without any presents. Lord Oldcastle has sent me a most beautiful present, a set of Sèvres china, and a quantity of silver-plate. Jane unpacked it all, and then packed it up again before I could look at it : but it made me very happy to think that I was welcomed by Lord Oldcastle. I enclose his letter for you to read. Is it not nice and kind ? Let me have it again. You see he excuses himself from attending our wedding. Mr. V. says that his father is not making a mere excuse, that he is really unequal to the journey.

I must tell you next about Sir Robert. He is

wonderfully well. He and I are constant companions again; and we have all sorts of strange confidences in our rambles. He cautions me against spoiling Mr. Verriker. The idea amuses me, while I feel so conscious of being spoilt myself; not by Mr. Verriker only, but by every one else. And now, Edmund, the rest of my letter is exclusively for you, remembering, as I do, the great interest you take in everything connected with Sir Arthur's Hall:—

Doubtless you remember the account I gave you of the interview which Mr. Chesney and dear Jane had at the *Lower Fall* with Sarah Pugh; and of the token which Mr. Chesney gave to Sarah Pugh, that he would attend to any future application which she might make to him.—

Last Friday was the third day after Alice's wedding. We were at breakfast, when Gerard came in with a note for Mr. Chesney, and said that the woman who brought it was waiting for an answer. Mr. Chesney just opened the envelope (he saw that it contained Sarah Pugh's token), and then he told Gerard to show the

woman into his (Mr. Chesney's) study, and to ask her to sit down.

What passed when he went to the study Mr. Chesney told afterwards to Jane and me. The woman was thickly veiled ; but she lifted her veil directly that Mr. Chesney entered the study. She told him that he had made her a promise to serve her when she should require it, and that the time was come ; and that, in serving her, he would be serving himself and his kindred.

Mr. Chesney asked Sarah Pugh how he was to keep his promise. She answered by quoting a few words from the scroll in Sir Arthur's Hall :—

“ ‘ When Devi shall to Dulas flow,
The curse is ended.’ ”

Then she said, “ But the curse cannot end, Sir Robert, without my interference. I was deputed to end it, when the time came, by one who dreaded the curse, and whose inheritance it was to end it. Richard Pugh is dead. You already know that he was descended from Ephraim Howle. You know too that the heiress of the Chesneys has gone to Capel. Give me access

to Sir Arthur's Hall, Sir Robert. Leave me there for three hours. Let me then quit this Castle, unobserved by any but yourself. Keep Sir Arthur's Hall closed against every one till the third day from this ; till Monday next ; and then I promise you, on the faith of a penitent, that you and yours may enter it harmless for all future time."

Mr. Chesney was impressed by the solemn and majestic air which Sarah Pugh assumed. He asked her no questions. He took the key of Sir Arthur's Hall from the bureau where he had kept it. He placed it in Sarah Pugh's hand. He told her to veil herself again and follow him. He took her to Sir Arthur's Hall by way of the old gallery and Mr. Vaughan's office. He pointed the door out to her. She unlocked it herself : told him not to follow her then, but to lock her in Sir Arthur's Hall, and to come back and release her again in three hours' time. All this was done ; and when Mr. Chesney released Sarah Pugh, he let her out by the front entry, and walked with her across the Park towards the

Lower Fall. They went along silently. When they parted, she said to him :—

“Leave me now, Sir Robert Chesney. My blessings rest with you and yours ; I know more of your forbearance and forgiveness than I knew when I met you here a month ago. I know how my husband sought your life once. You will never see or hear of me again, Sir Robert. My last duty is fulfilled ; it was enjoined on me by the man who sought to murder you. It was part of his repentance. You will know what my last duty has been if you go to Sir Arthur’s Hall on Monday next. Go yourself, if you so will. The curse is ended.”

“Explain to me how it is ended,” said Mr. Chesney.

“Listen then,” she answered. “When Sir Arthur Chesney murdered his son, after Worcester fight, he murdered Gwendoline Gwyn’s husband, for Sir Lionel and Gwendoline Gwyn had been secretly married. The curse was ordained to stand till that severed knot was reunited ; till there was a marriage between a Chesney and a

Gwyn. Then the scroll in Sir Arthur's Hall was to be burnt by the agency of one of Jedediah Howle's kindred, if such there existed ; if not, by one who was willing to undertake the obligation that lay on that wicked race. I have done what lay on my husband to have done, had he been alive. There is another fatality behind, Sir Robert Chesney. It rests upon a prophecy which has been handed down, but has never been put into writing. Shall I speak it, though it may mar your happiness ? ”

“ Let me hear it, if you believe it,” said Mr. Chesney.

“ You are the last of the Chesneys, Sir Robert. The children of Alice, Lady Glenarvon, will succeed to your heritage.”

“ And may they be worthy of it,” said Mr. Chesney. And then Sarah Pugh went away.

I leave you to guess how thoroughly Mr. Chesney believes in all that Sarah Pugh said to him. Yesterday morning he did what he never dared to do before. He went with Jane and me into Sir Arthur's Hall. We had a torch, and could see

directly what had happened. Sir Arthur's effigy and the scroll were gone ; the very chair on which the effigy used to be seated was gone, so was the bier gone from the adjoining room. In the place of all those things was a little heap of ashes, gathered over the spot where Sir Lionel's blood had been shed. We removed the ashes, and we then saw that the blood-stains had vanished. The fire, lit over the spot by Sarah Pugh, had destroyed the bier, the effigy, and the scroll, and had burnt the stains out of the floor.

When we came away, Mr. Chesney locked the door of the north rooms again ; he said that some day he would have them thrown open.

After we had left Sir Arthur's Hall, Mr. Chesney took Jane and me to his study. Of course, we could do nothing but talk of, and wonder at, the strange history that had now been brought to a close. Mr. Chesney showed us Sir Lionel's sapphire ring, and showed us also the three manuscripts which he had had from Sarah Pugh a month before. I must give you some account of each of these manuscripts ; otherwise

the story of Sir Arthur's Hall will not be quite complete.

The first manuscript is Rodolph Chesney's copy of the scroll. The pencil-writing has been inked over by some one since. Jane says that the copy is quite accurate. The curious part of it is, that, in the fifth line, under the word *Devi*, are written the words *Chesney's heiress*, and under the word *Dulas* are written the words *Bye Capel Park*. These additions are in a small but distinct hand; the hand, Mr. Chesney says, of Ephraim Howle.

The second manuscript is Ephraim Howle's Will, as described by the Curé of Morlaix in the letter which Mr. Chesney, when staying at the Grange, had from the Curé, and which Mr. Chesney showed to you, Edmund, at the time.

Ephraim Howle's Will is not so strictly a Will as a confused narrative, written at different times. —It tells how he, Ephraim, was brother's son to Jedediah Howle; how he had been brought up by his uncle Jedediah; how he was present when his uncle died, in the year 1667, four years after the death of Sir Arthur Chesney, and how his uncle

on his death-bed had given him certain information and instructions which he, Ephraim, was to put in writing, or otherwise transmit to his heirs. Some of these facts and instructions are then recorded in the Will, viz. the fact of Sir Lionel Chesney's murder, of Jedediah Howle's complicity in concealing the same, of the curse which Sir Arthur had called down on his own race, and of the penalties which awaited others who ventured to meddle with the north rooms till such time as the curse had been expiated.

Jedediah Howle had described the rooms to his nephew; the secret passage, the effigy, the scroll, the blood-stains, and the coffin. He had repeated the words of the curse to Ephraim, and Ephraim recollected enough of them to enable him to decipher and re-inscribe the enclosed manuscript, which came into his hands nearly fifty years after his uncle's death. Jedediah Howle had further told his nephew that the curse could only be put an end to by three things, all indispensable to the result. The first was by burying Sir Lionel's remains in consecrated ground, the second was

by the heiress of the Chesneys marrying the heir of the Gwyns, the third was by burning the effigy and the scroll on the spot where Sir Lionel's blood had been shed. Jedediah Howle had laid upon Ephraim and his heirs the duty of assisting at the first process whenever required so to do, and the duty of performing the third, single-handed, when the second had come to pass : but till the time for that third duty came, neither Ephraim nor his descendants were to enter the north rooms except by the secret entry, nor were they to touch, or even look at, the scroll. Jedediah's own curse lay on any of his kindred who transgressed or neglected these duties or injunctions. Jedediah Howle had further told Ephraim that none of the penalties connected with Sir Arthur's Hall attached to any woman. As the main curse was to be cancelled by the act of a woman, so women were exempt from the operation of the curse at all times.

The rest of Ephraim Howle's narrative or Will relates more to himself, and his acts subsequent to his uncle's death. He tells the story of what

he calls *Sir Rodolph Chesney's impiety* ; how Ephraim knew at the time that Sir Rodolph was doomed for what he had done ; how he, Ephraim, had seen Sir Rodolph drop a piece of paper into Sir Lionel's coffin when they were adjusting the lid thereof ; and how, after Sir Rodolph's death, Ephraim thought it well to recover that piece of paper, and, finding what it was, to make it as perfect a copy of the scroll as his memory of his uncle's words would enable him to make it.

And, finally, Ephraim Howle, writing the latter part of his Will in the year 1723, dwells on the value of the aforesaid copy, and on its importance to Sir Fitzroy Chesney (then Lord of Delamare Castle), if he would buy it. He bequeaths the said copy, and all his worldly effects, and also the obligations which still lay upon the kindred of Jedediah Howle to his granddaughter, Mary, the wife of John Morgan.

The third manuscript which Sarah Pugh had given to Mr. Chesney was in the handwriting of the Curé of Morlaix. It contained statements

made by Richard Pugh, at various times, during his last illness. For instance,—

Richard Pugh said that Mary Howle, wife of John Morgan, was married in 1721, as he had found by consulting the registers of Llandeви Church; that their only daughter, Jane Morgan, had married James Pugh, who was the father of John Pugh, who was the father of Ephraim Pugh, who was the father of Richard Pugh, the deponent; all which descents he had made out, with many more particulars, from the registers of Llandeви and other churches.

Richard Pugh said that he was quite at a loss to know why Mary Morgan, or one of her descendants, had not sold the copy of the “Chesney Curse” to one of that family. “They had all known its value,” he said, “otherwise they would not have been so careful to transmit it from one to the other, together with Ephraim Howle’s Will.”

Richard Pugh admitted that his object in getting his wife to meet him on the night of April the 15th at the north rooms was that he might induce her to steal the original scroll from Sir

Arthur's Hall, so as to deprive the Chesneys for ever of the few hints which it gave for their security. He had also intended to have left the door of Sir Arthur's Hall wide open, so that Robert Chesney might be tempted to enter the room next morning when he heard of its having been opened. He further admitted that the temptation to steal money, coupled with the terror shown by his wife, had altered his first resolutions ; but that he had meant to carry them out on some other day. He also stated that, when his wife left him, he lost his senses for the minute ; and as he retreated through the hall, he was again so minded to steal the scroll himself, that he not only looked at it, but rubbed the dust off it, and read it, and then covered it up with dust again. That he had scarcely done this, when the recollection came upon him that it was death, after reading that scroll, to pass back by the way that he came ;—that he went again into the room where he had stolen the money, hoping to find egress there. As he surveyed the doors and windows, he heard the approach of footsteps ;

he heard the growls of the deerhound ; he heard some one try a door of the very room in which he was. In utter despair of any other mode of escape, he rushed into Sir Arthur's Hall, locked the door behind him, and made good his retreat past the effigy, through the bier-room, and out by the secret passage. From that moment he knew that he was doomed, and he determined to use the life that yet remained to him for one object, viz. revenge.

Richard Pugh further stated that his revenge had since been disappointed. He stated the way in which it had been disappointed ; but as that was matter of private confession, the Curé omitted it from his statement.

Finally, when Richard Pugh was penitent and dying, he charged his wife to fulfil the duty which had hitherto lain on himself about the scroll in Sir Arthur's Hall. He instructed her what she was to do, and when to do it ; and if the time did not come, while she was living, to take care that the duty was delegated to Richard Pugh's nearest of kin. He also desired his wife

to make every reparation in her power for the injuries which he had done and meditated against Robert Chesney.

And now, Edmund, I think I have told you everything that these papers contained,—everything, that is, which you and I did not know before yesterday. We shall all look forward with anxiety to hear something more of Sarah Pugh. Mr. Chesney has already ascertained that she has left Milford. Her mother does not know, or will not say, whither she has gone. Mr. Chesney says that her manner on Friday was very solemn and striking. He fancies she is under the influence of high religious enthusiasm, and that if she, like her husband, has become a Catholic, she will probably join some sisterhood or religious society.

How earnestly she must have engaged in her three hours' work on Friday! She must have prepared many materials for the fire, and must have had them concealed about her person; and then there was the labour of breaking up all the materials that were in the hall before, though to be sure they might have been rather decayed ;

and lastly, the patience of watching them all smoulder away till nothing hardly was left.

Mr. Chesney is going to write the whole story out in a book ; and dear Jane is to illustrate it as well as she can, which we know will be better than any one else could have done. What shall I do when it comes to parting with dear Jane? Oh! how I dread it; and I have told Mr. Verriker so, very often. He is not offended; and, to stop my tears, he has promised that, whenever I like, I may come and stay with dear Jane, whether he is able to accompany me or not. Mr. Verriker always keeps his promises; so, indeed, I ought to be comforted by this one. I am very grateful to him for making it; but it is so generous and unselfish that I doubt whether I can ever take much advantage of it.

And now you must both of you, dears, agree that I have been a very dutiful sister; for I have written on and on, till I have positively left myself only half an hour to write to Mr. Verriker.

Fondest love to Aunt, baby, and yourselves.

Your affectionate Sister,

SOPHIA.

Castle Delamare,

June 25th, 18—.

DEAREST EDMUND AND LUCY,—Mr. Verriker returned last evening. He and Sir Robert and dear Jane have been decreeing my destiny between them. I told them I would not interfere in any way. So they have settled that my wedding-day is to be Tuesday, the thirteenth of July, which happens to be Sir Robert's birthday. When I hear that you, Edmund, and George can be present, I shall make up my mind to the worst. I have hoped also that dear Aunt and Mr. Timmins, one or both of them, would be able to come ; but still I must not be so selfish as to urge it, remembering, dearest Lucy, that you cannot be here, and that it would be very hard for you to be left quite alone. If baby were a little more of a companion, I should try and coax you, Lucy, or perhaps in that case I might expect you and baby as well. I must leave off wishing and expecting altogether, for really I am getting quite spoilt by the way that every one tries to meet my wishes.

The next wish I shall mention is Sir Robert's

and Mr. Chesney's, not mine. They say that whichever of you come must arrange to stay a month at least, as all here, especially dear Jane, will be so dull when I am gone. Dear Jane! I really believe she will miss my teasing as much as I shall miss her constant, tender love. I must not talk or think on the subject. Happy and blessed as I am, when parting with Jane comes across my thoughts, it is like that great black cloud which is now hanging over the Devi.

Mr. Verriker leaves us again on Tuesday next, and does not return here till the twelfth of July, the day before the wedding. I hope you, Edmund, and your party will contrive to reach us on the tenth, so as to avoid travelling on Sunday, about which, I am sorry to say, Mr. V. is too indifferent. The first lecture I have had to give him has been on that subject. He says that, if possible, he will avoid it, and come on the tenth; and that in future he will arrange his plans with more forethought. After all, the present plan is not of his arranging, so I ought not to have said so much to him.

Jane has told you about my wedding-dress, and so forth. Was it not kind and thoughtful of dear Alice to remember me so ? We had another letter from her this morning. They are still in Paris ;— she reports herself ‘ quite as happy as can be expected.’ Of course, we know well enough that if she was unhappy, she would be the last to talk about it. She seems to be giving way to Lord G., however, in some things, for she says, he is “ so devoted to the insufferable heat ” of Paris that she feels it would be cruel to tear him away. She was to dispatch all my things to-day.

I can fancy dear Aunt rather unhappy at my not having given her a good deal of trouble about my *trousseau* ; but you see how it is when there are two candidates for all the troubles of the family. Dear Jane, being on the spot, has the advantage of Aunt, and has taken good care to monopolize all the worry.

Sir Robert is going on very well. The hot weather, they say, is just what will suit him best ; but that Jane will have to be very watchful when winter comes. Alice’s last letter is half-filled

with instructions to Jane about taking care of Sir Robert in December, when Alice knows quite well that she herself will be back at Capel. Fancy Alice being a fidget herself, and fidgeting dear Jane! The two ideas are absurd in themselves, and quite incompatible. If Alice becomes a fidget, it does not follow that Jane will; but if dear Jane becomes a fidget, we shall all of us have to be put under some sort of constraint, having lost our sheet-anchor.

I should, before I close my letter, tell you how well dear Jane is looking. I don't know that I don't feel a little injured myself at seeing her so calm and happy, when I am going to leave her. However, Jane is Jane, and we can't make anything but Jane out of Jane; and I am glad that we can't.

Robert Chesney you will desire to hear of. He is the same good-natured, imperturbable, inscrutable being as ever. He looks upon me as a sort of puppet in a show, and he looks at Jane as a sort of unearthly piece of perfection. He is right about Jane; I shall show him some day that he

is not quite right about me; but I love him dearly, though he misunderstands me sometimes. I should love any one who loved Jane.

I must throw down my pen; Rollo tells me I am wanted. He knows as well as I do when *some one* wants us both to go down to the river. And the black cloud has passed away without a storm. So adieu, dears, with fondest love to you all from

Your affectionate

SOPHIA.

CHAPTER X.

“You darlings ! who could have imagined such felicity as finding you both again in the same nest, my own old nest, too ?”

Such were the words with which Lady Glenarvon broke into the boudoir, once her own, on the Christmas Eve after her wedding, and found Mrs. Verriker and Jane Bentley closeted there together. We need not stop to describe the more demonstrative part of the greetings which ensued between the three. We will attend to those three ladies, rather, as they become coherent and intelligible.

“And, Sophy dear,” said Lady Glenarvon, “now let me survey you more at leisure. Look-

ing uncommonly well, Sophy, seeing that you have been a bride four, actually five, months ! And pray how long have you been here, Sophy ?”

“An hour longer than you, Alice ; I got here at three o’clock.”

“And where is the idol, Sophy ? I am come here to be hostess for a time. I ought to welcome the idol at once.”

“The idol is, I am sorry to say, detained at Twickenham. I left him yesterday, very well, very happy, and very accommodating. Dear Jane and you are my idols now. Mr. Verriker has consented to my coming here, all by myself, and to my staying here till he can follow me.”

“And still you look so bonny and merry, Sophy ! I should not have suspected you of such heroinism.”

“I am not merry because I have left Twickenham. It is because I am with dear Jane and you again. When did you return home, Alice ?”

“I came to Capel on the twenty-second, the day before yesterday ; I came *home* when I entered this room, ten minutes since.”

"Is Lord Glenarvon with you?" asked Jane Bentley. "Of course he is, though; and you are both come to spend Christmas here; and is Lady Glenarvon here too? and will she stay? Don't look provoking, Alice, when I have made up my mind to such a happy gathering. You know I ought to see about your rooms at once, and have everything arranged as you wish."

"Sophy, a happy widow! and Jane a bustling manager! What will be the next metamorphosis, I wonder, in this quiet abode? Jane, let me look at you once again before you calm down. Oh! subsided I see! Jane, I am come to dethrone you. Please to give me an account of your conduct as my representative. Tell me first about dear father? Do you think him getting through the winter well, Jane?"

"Yes! very well, Alice. Have you not seen him yet? We think him looking very well. Sophy has seen him, and was quite struck with his good looks."

"Oh! I suppose he brightened up at the sight of Sophy. Quite natural and proper too! But,

Jane, has there been no fear at all, since this cold weather set in ? ”

“ No, none. Sir Robert has become very prudent about going out too early or too late. He is in the house now ; probably having a nap in his own room. He will be here presently, or else in Mr. Chesney’s study, to have the newspaper read to him. He has complained of cold feet at night, but that, you know, can be easily provided against.”

“ Hot-water tins, I suppose, Jane. And you really think him as young and gay as when you first knew him ? ”

“ Yes ; I can conscientiously say that.”

“ And how about my brother, Jane ? What can you tell me of him ? Any more catastrophes, Jane ; or is it still only the advance of premature old age ? ”

“ Mr. Chesney is always the same, Alice ; altered in no respect ; perhaps more interested about his improvements and about the slate-quarry, and about a pack of harriers which he has established. I can tell you of no other change.”

"Faultless, of course, dear! And you are very happy yourself, my own Jane?"

"Yes, Alice; happier than I ever could have dreamt I should be, when you and Sophy had left us. I am getting quite dissipated. I go out with the harriers twice a week, and enjoy it thoroughly."

"Yes, darling, and a very good thing for you too. And will Mr. Vaughan be here this evening and to-morrow? And is he quite as lovable as ever?"

"Yes, quite as lovable, quite as active, quite as well. He is generally here now; and when he hears that you have arrived and are going to stay, there will be little danger of his wandering far. But, Alice, you are asking about persons, all of whom you will see presently. Tell me, are you in earnest about having come to stay here? And will Lord Glenarvon be here to dinner?"

"I am going to stay here for a considerable period, Jane; a fortnight probably. I saw Hughes, and told her about my room, so don't fidget about that."

"And when will Lord Glenarvon be here ? Sophy and I want to see him particularly. We were talking about him when you entered, but had not the least idea that you and he were in England."

"What can you want to see him for, dears ? To condole with him, I suppose. Very well ! let me see ! To-morrow is Christmas Day, and the next day is Sunday. We will drive over to Capel on Monday, dears, to see how Glenarvon is looking."

"I hope Lord Glenarvon is quite well ?" exclaimed Mrs. Verriker in a bewildered tone.

"Yes, thank you, Sophy ; tolerably well, I should say, but not quite in Christmas trim. The Dowager, too, is a little indisposed. They have naturally a great deal to talk about, after their long separation."

"Alice," said Jane, "you are joking ; you would not leave either Lady Glenarvon or your husband for a day, unless you were assured of their perfect health and happiness."

"I would do as I pleased, dear Jane, about that.

The fact is that Lady Glenarvon is extremely happy, though not very well ; and she encouraged me of all things to come here for a few days, because she knew I wished it."

"And Lord Glenarvon?" said Sophy.

"Poor man! perhaps he is rather so-so; a little irritable, you know, Sophy, or inclined so to be. My only anxiety is lest Lady G. should make too much fuss with him during my absence."

"Alice; Alice!" said Sophy. "I see you are only joking now. But tell us the truth. When is Lord Glenarvon coming?"

"When he pleases, Sophy, dear. Not before Monday, certainly. And then we shall see him at Capel, you know; and you can urge him to come back with us, if you wish it."

"And won't you urge him, too, Alice?" said Sophy.

"I think not, Sophy. Don't be alarmed, dear. There has never been the slightest symptom of incompatibility between my husband and me. My rule has been quite uniform, and, as I think,

considerate ;—always to suppose him to be well and usefully employed when out of my sight. He returns my benevolence by anticipating and promoting all my wishes. That is the cause, or rather one condition, of my being here to-day.”

“I thought you said he was inclined to be irritable,” persisted Sophy.

“Not with me, dear. That would indeed be sad. I must tell him of your supposing such a thing possible. I wonder whether he will be more amused or astonished.”

“Alice, I shan’t talk to you if you repeat anything that we say when we are here together.”

“Don’t you make a point of telling your husband everything, Sophy ? Now, I’ll answer for it that Mr. Verriker will hear—let me see—about Monday next, of the sad state of feeling which exists between Lord and Lady G. ; within a few months, too, after they were married.”

“Now you *have* offended me, Alice. I am neither so foolish as to suppose anything of the

sort, nor so unkind as to say it, even if I thought it."

"Not to your husband, Sophy? nor to Jane?"

"Not to my husband, certainly. As to Jane, she loves you, Alice, as much as I do; and I never conceal my thoughts from Jane."

"Sophy, don't be vexed, dear," said Jane. "Alice is only trying to find out whether you are the same warm-hearted, impulsive little being that she used to love so."

"That was all, Sophy, dear," said Lady Glenarvon. "I am quite satisfied with my experiment. And we will agree to be strictly confidential. So tell me now, Sophy, when you expect Mr. Verriker."

"Not till the middle of January at the earliest, Alice. Mr. Verriker promised me, before we were married, that I should be with Jane as much as I liked; so you see he has kept his word."

"Without any coercion, too, Sophy, I imagine. Really that is very charming. It is, of course, necessary to get one's own way in such arrange-

ments, but to do it so gently is a happiness reserved for very few. You must teach me the process, dear. And now, Jane, tell me about the old home and every one there. All well and prosperous, I trust."

"Aunt particularly active and well; dear Lucy and little Jane flourishing exceedingly; Edmund quite in spirits about his prospects; George at home for Christmas, and talking of paying us a visit here in January."

"That is all well; but is George's coming pretty certain? Glenarvon wants to have him at Capel for as long as he can be spared. He was intending to write to him."

"If Lord Glenarvon writes, that will make George's coming quite certain," said Jane. "He will look upon Lord Glenarvon's wish as an obligation quite as much as a kindness."

"Well!—you know George is a favourite at all times with my husband; and at this particular time I know that he wants to consult him professionally. About thorough-drainage, I think it is; it is nothing that I understand at any rate.

We will leave them to make their own engagements then, shall we, Jane?"

"Yes, that will be best. And George knows that he can come here at any time that will square with his other duties. I wish Edmund were coming too. Now that Mr. Timmins is at the Grange, Edmund and he might easily manage to give each other an occasional holiday, one doing for a time the work of both. I think that Edmund will try to come when he knows that Sophy is here."

"Do he and Mr. Timmins pull well together, Jane? You know that that plan of combining two households does not always answer."

"No! I believe that it generally fails. But, if it answers at all, it answers, as in our case, very well. While the parish was so much disturbed by petty quarrels, I used to think that perhaps Mr. Timmins's partizanship, zealous though it was, did not tend to Edmund's real comfort. But now all is tranquil again, and the majority of the parishioners being peacefully disposed, the minority is necessarily quiet. It was

a sad blow to Aunt and Edmund when the knowledge was forced upon them that all the mischief which was going on originated with their pastor."

"With their pastor and his wife, I should say rather," remarked Lady Glenarvon. "I cannot imagine anything more mischievous to a young girl than the kind of influence which Mrs. Gumming endeavoured to establish over Sophy."

"I have always tried to excuse Mrs. Gumming to myself, Alice," answered Jane. "Hers was—must have been—a very sad and anxious life, tied to such a husband. I don't think that I ever thoroughly suspected and disliked any one so much as Mr. Gumming. But both Sophy and I remember Mrs. Gumming as quite a different person to what she had become when you were at the Grange, Alice;—lively, genial, unsuspecting, and uncomplaining."

"Yes, indeed," added Mrs. Verriker, "I used to love Mrs. Gumming; and I think I could love her again, if it were not for one or two reminiscences."

"Well, you were both very Bentley-like, I

must say, in keeping your aversions out of sight. Pray what has become of the Gummings? You told me in one of your letters that they had left Fairbourne; but whither have they carried their virtues?"

"The last we heard of them was that they were living in Chester; but we have not been anxious to trace their movements. Edmund, I am glad to say, made Mr. Gumming a present of the money which Mr. Gumming owed him, and there, I trust, their acquaintance ceased for ever," said Jane.

"Do you mean to say, Jane," exclaimed Sophy, "that Mr. Gumming was one of the people who borrowed money from Edmund?"

"Indeed it was so, Sophy; and yet no one was more unpitying of dear Edmund's misfortunes than the man who had so far helped to increase them."

"The wretch!" said Lady Glenarvon. "Let us talk no more about him. Have they a clergyman at Fairbourne now whom they like, Jane?"

"They have two; both highly respected and

one very much liked. The rector himself is resident. His only daughter presides over his household. He, we always knew, was a shy, reserved, and perhaps proud man, but sincere and just, and kind-hearted. She, I hear, is both beautiful and good, though too young as yet to make her goodness a general benefit to the parish. The curate, Mr. Dyne, is extolled by every one. He is often at the Grange ; so that you see Aunt's and Edmund's new happiness has more than one aspect."

"I hope Edmund will come here," said Lady Glenarvon. "I should so like to talk with him over all his troubles, now that they are past. Shall I write to him, or shall I send my love to him by you, Jane, and a message telling him how often I have thought of him and how I long to see him?"

"The message will be best, Alice," interposed Sophy. "You can make a message, you know, so much warmer than if you wrote it down yourself."

"Just what struck me, Sophy; and I shall

think nothing of an indiscretion which is sanctioned by you. So, Jane, your instructions are complete; and you can also tell Edmund, as if it were your own sentiment, that I am not a person who likes to be refused."

"I can adopt that last sentiment very candidly," said Jane.

"But you don't believe in the love and the interest, Jane? Is that what I am to understand by the emphasis which you laid on the word *last*?"

"I believe in it all," interrupted Sophy, "and so does dear Jane, only she thinks it necessary to look severely proper when I am by. She will give all your message, Alice. Trust Jane for keeping nothing back that will please Edmund or get him here."

"And why are liberal views to be discouraged in your presence, Sophy? Does Jane consider your fetters to need any straitening?"

"Ask her, Alice," replied Mrs. Verriker. "Ask her about the half-lecture which I received within an hour of my arrival, just because I

had inquired very particularly about Sir Walter, and because I said that I longed to see him, and to show him that I had not forgotten old times."

"And longed to propose going fishing with him, Sophy," added Jane.

"Yes ! and I *shall* propose it," answered Mrs. Verriker, "and if you like, you can come too, Jane ; and I shall tease you for Sir Walter's amusement."

"But surely, Sophy," said Lady Glenarvon, laughing heartily, "you must get a better excuse than fishing. Won't skating do ? There is no fishing at this time of year for people in their senses."

"Oh ! but there is, Alice. There is greyling-fishing in the deep water above the upper fall. Mr. Chesney told me it would be very good this winter. But, as you suggest, if the frost continues, I must send to the Grange for my skates. Yes ! George or Edmund can bring them."

"But Jane skates too, does she not, Sophy ?"

"Oh yes ! nothing Jane used to be more vain

about than her skating. We will send for dear Jane's skates also."

"How do you know, Sophy, that Sir Walter skates?" asked Jane. "I don't believe that he does anything of the kind."

"All the better, dear Jane. I shall then have to teach him, which you know will admit of the most cordial exchange of sentiments and sympathies."

"Yes, Sophy," said Lady Glenarvon, "if the dear man, for instance, should, through your neglect, come down, thump, on the back of his head, the least you can do will be to skate up to him and commence rubbing the injured part."

"Which I should certainly do with the tenderest *empressement*," said Mrs. Verriker, "especially if dear Jane was within view. And we'll ask Lord Glenarvon to come, and then he will be able to give us a caricature of the whole scene afterwards."

"But I don't allow caricaturing any longer, Sophy. It is one of the things expressly forbidden," said Lady Glenarvon.

"Well, perhaps the caricature had better be omitted," said Mrs. Verriker. "I don't know that I should like to see dear Sir Walter caricatured. It was Jane's shocked face that I thought of most as worth a memorial."

"Dear Jane!" said Lady Glenarvon. "Now, Sophy, I will not have Jane teased any more."

"But, Alice, do take my part in one thing," said Mrs. Verriker. "Don't you think it was rather starchy of Jane to talk to me about *the* 'sobriety and prudence which became my altered position?' As if Mr. Verriker had not always encouraged my attention to dear Sir Walter, and as if Mr. Verriker was not as fond of him as I am."

"That is not the point, Sophy," interposed Jane. "The question is as to what is due to yourself. No one ever doubted your remembering what was due to your husband."

"It is due to myself, Jane, that I should not forget or seem to forget, or change in any way, towards a very dear friend. I would not hurt Sir Walter's feelings for the world; and it only

makes me love my husband the more, because he never thinks of interfering with me in such a matter. I am not going to offend you, dear Jane, all the same. If I can't get you to think as I think, I must do as you dictate."

"Dear Sophy, we will say no more about it, then. You shall do as you like in everything. I have quite returned to my old creed, that your own heart, dearest, is an infallible guide," said Jane.

"What a pretty little quarrel, and how prettily ended!" exclaimed Lady Glenarvon. "I am glad to see, dears, that neither matrimony nor separation has altered either of you. Ah me! how I love to be with you both again! Jane, dear, you will tell me if you hear my father go downstairs."

"I heard him go down not a minute since," said Sophy, "while dear Jane was speaking."

"Then, dears, I will follow him. It will save him coming upstairs again. I think you said that he would go to Robert's study, Jane?"

"Yes, dear, if he did not come here. He will

hear of your arrival almost as soon as he gets there. He will ring for Davis to come and read the paper to him, and Davis will tell him that you are here."

Then Lady Glenarvon went, and Mrs. Verriker said to Jane,—

"I shall read for Sir Robert while I am here, Jane."

"He will not allow you, Sophy. I often propose doing it. I read other things for him ; but he prefers Davis as news-reader."

"Jane, dear, what do you think about Alice ? Happy, quite happy, Jane ?"

"Yes, dear, I trust so. You have not any doubt on the subject, have you ? She was only trying to amuse us, or perhaps surprise us, by talking in her old, indifferent way."

"Yes, I saw all that, and saw how she hugs the idea that none of us are changed. But just before she went away, and looked round the room, and said, ' Ah me ! how I love to be with you both again ! ' I thought there was something very sad in her tone."

"Yes, dearest, it was Alice's heart that spoke then. But just consider. Suppose that, instead of coming here for Christmas, you had gone to the Grange, and were revisiting some scene associated with your childhood and its delights, would your feelings, however happy you might be in general, be altogether free from sadness at that particular moment?"

"No, perhaps not. Though Alice has such a tender heart, she seldom lets it speak. When she does, the effect is greater on one than it ought to be. How do you think dear Alice looking, Jane?"

"Very well indeed. A little more of her scanty remains of girlishness gone, perhaps; but her beauty more lofty and impressive than ever."

"And if that change strikes you and me, Jane, it will be sure to strike others more."

"Yes, naturally it will. It is just the change which will tell most on Lord Glenarvon's fancy. But you are going to have another visitor now, Sophy. I hear Robert Chesney coming along the corridor."

And accordingly Robert Chesney, followed by Rollo, now entered the boudoir. While Robert Chesney's two hands were enfolding Mrs. Verriker's one with an emphatic and prolonged pressure, her other hand was caressing Rollo, whose dumb welcome of his old friend and companion it was touching to witness.

"Your coming makes all things glad, you see, Sophy," said Robert Chesney, alluding to the dog's demonstrations. "We shall indeed have a merry Christmas, now that you are here. I shan't ask you how you are; that is quite unnecessary; nor whether your journey has fatigued you; that would be equally superfluous. I wonder whether you will be more fatigued when you have answered all the questions I am going to put. First about Verriker; I have seen Alice, and she tells me that he cannot be here till the middle of next month. Is that delay unavoidable?"

"Indeed it is, Mr. Chesney; I will tell you exactly why. The head clerk is taking his Christmas holiday, and Mr. Verriker and he can never be absent from duty together. The busi-

ness is increasing, so that they have determined to have another partner resident in London. When he arrives, Mr. Verriker will have much more holiday."

"And does Verriker really work so hard, and like it?"

"He both does it and enjoys it, I assure you. I will tell you. We took up our abode at Twickenham on the eleventh of August. From that time to this, there has not been a day in any week on which he has not been six hours at work in the City."

"And dear little solitary Sophy speaks of it as a thing to be proud of, rather than a subject of complaint. I am glad to see that," said Robert Chesney.

"Mr. Verriker is proud of his work, and I am proud of never hindering him in it, Mr. Chesney. You cannot think how happy we have been under a system which, to say the least, was new to both of us."

"I never could picture either of you in a state of unhappiness, taking you singly; but I must con-

fess that I did not expect the combination to result in such an increase of happiness for you both."

"I have never had a moment's unhappiness since my wedding-day, Mr. Chesney ; and I think Mr. Verriker would tell you the same of himself. Even yesterday, when we parted for the first time since our marriage, in the cold, dark morning at Paddington, we had neither of us a tear or a regret to exchange. I don't mind boasting of it, because I know it is all due to my husband."

"I don't think such unequivocal successes are ever achieved single-handed, Sophy. But you shall account for it all in whatever way consoles, or rather pleases, you most. I must talk it all over with dear Jane before I shall quite understand it. Do you understand it, Jane ?"

"Yes, Robert Chesney, I think I do. It is a very old dream of mine that Mr. Verriker and Sophy were made for each other, and each for no one but the other."

"And if J. B. dreamt that, the dream will be likely to last," said Robert Chesney. "How do you think J. B. looking, Sophy ? Do you con-

clude that we have taken half the care of her that she has taken of us ?”

“As regards looks, she is dear, beautiful, unchangeable Jane still, Mr. Chesney. As regards care, she must have been well tended, except that she can hardly have had any of that judicious teasing which is really necessary to her perfect well-being. I shall make up that deficiency in your system of management. That is one of my chief objects in coming, you know. I had made a beginning just now, but Alice interfered on Jane’s behalf.”

“Not till she had fairly embarked you on your naughty purpose, Sophy,” said Jane. “Alice is in a mischievous mood to-day, Robert Chesney; and, if it continues, I foresee some difficulty in managing her and Sophy together, without their husbands.”

“I don’t think the husbands will help your jurisdiction, dear Jane,” said Robert Chesney. “One, we know, stands in awe of his wife, and the other seems to be in love with his, which is nearly the same thing.”

"I am collecting materials for a letter to Twickenham," said Mrs. Verriker. "There is a nice little bit of news for me to begin with, viz., that Mr. Chesney says that my husband is half afraid of me."

"You had better be content with the fact, Sophy, and not parade it to Verriker. Pray, how will he spend his evenings, now that you are away?"

"He has got a great many engagements for one thing, dinner engagements with the City people, you know, just what we avoid when I am with him. Then he has all the household affairs to look after, and to write a long letter every day to me."

"Is Lord Oldcastle in town, Sophy?" asked Robert Chesney.

"No; he does not come till April."

"You have seen him, have you not?"

"Oh yes! he came to stay with us for three days last month. Jane, why did you not tell Mr. Chesney?"

"I did most probably," answered Jane, "only he forgets."

"I suppose Jane told me as if she thought it of no consequence," said Robert Chesney. "In that case I might not have noticed it; but tell me, Sophy, was his Lordship properly impressed with his daughter-in-law?"

"I was quite pleased with his kind manner, and so forth," said Mrs. Verriker. "Of course I expected nothing more."

"That means that Mr. Verriker was not so well satisfied with papa's condescensions as Mrs. Verriker was. Am I right, Sophy?"

"It would not be easy to satisfy Mr. Verriker," said Jane, "that Sophy had all that was due to her from any one, not even from himself."

"You dear old Jane! And pray who was it that used to spoil Sophy in the same way before she knew Mr. Verriker?"

"Well put indeed, Sophy," said Robert Chesney; "but I don't admit the word *spoil*. We will say *pet* instead. I think every one used to pet you, Sophy; perhaps Jane more than any one else. The result has not been very unfortu-

nate I think, not even in the pleasure it must give Verriker to keep up the custom."

"A pretty speech from Mr. Chesney!" exclaimed Mrs. Verriker. "I *am* delighted with that rarity. There is another bit of news for me to report to Twickenham to-morrow. But I think I remember two people whose good opinion I always coveted very much, who never did pet me. One was my brother Edmund, the other was Mr. Chesney."

"I never accused myself of any shortcoming in that respect. If I was neglectful however, I quite mean to make up for it now. What can I undertake or promise this evening, Sophy?"

"Let me see! If Sir Walter is at church to-morrow, you must ask him to come and dine here, Sir. I meant to speak to Sir Robert about that, but *you* shall have the pleasure of gratifying me."

"Thank you, Sophy. But surely I can do many more things besides that to please you?"

"If the frost goes, Sir, you are to take me out hunting, and let me do as I like."

"Very well, Sophy. If I concede the former, the latter is sure to follow. Which of the horses will you call your own? There are three which carry a lady—Phantasy and Verity and Sorcerer."

"Sorcerer? I don't remember him."

"No, perhaps you never saw him. He is a great favourite, though. It was through Sorcerer that I gained an introduction to Gossett Grange."

"Oh! when you had your accident in Summer-tree Lane. No! I never saw Sorcerer, but always felt inclined to excuse him for his one mistake. Now I'll answer for it that dear Jane likes to ride Sorcerer. I shall choose my old favourite Phantasy, Sir."

"Yes, Sophy," said Jane, "Phantasy will suit you much the best; especially if you are to do as you like. He is so gentle and tractable, and so full of associations for your mind Sophy."

"I might revenge myself, Jane, by saying something about Sorcerer's associations; but, as Mr. Chesney is present, I shall spare you. I was going—"

"Well, Sophy," interrupted Mr. Chesney, "you have not finished your commands to me. Suppose the frost does *not* go. What can I do for you then?"

"Come skating, Sir, and get dear Jane to come. You can't think how well she skates. And I want you to take me shooting when you go. And I want you to let me have Rollo to sleep at my bedroom door while I am here."

"Sophy," said Jane, "you need not ask for that. I am going to have you to sleep in my room."

"I shall agree to no such thing, Jane. You know you always liked to have your room to yourself. Jane is so dreadfully neat and tidy, Mr. Chesney, that she never could endure the thought of a companion in her room. And now she wants me there, who am very untidy."

"As you have appealed to Mr. Chesney, Sophy, you oblige me to tell him that you could never bear to sleep by yourself. Sophy used to sleep with Alice, Robert Chesney, when she was here, and at Gossett Grange with Lucy."

"But I have got over that weakness, Jane, now."

"No, Sophy, you have not. It was your old nervousness that made you ask to have Rollo to sleep at your door."

"If I am to decide so delicate a question, Sophy," said Robert Chesney, "I must say that dear Jane has made out her case against you. You are quite welcome to Rollo, but I advise you to take Jane's offer."

"Yes, Sophy dear, do," said Jane. "I shall so like to have you; and, besides, you are not to say that you are untidy; and if you were untidy, it would not matter to me, for you will have a dressing-room to yourself."

"Dear old Jane! Under those circumstances, I shall be only too glad to tease you by night as well as by day."

"Any more domestic troubles or wants that I can set right,—any more commands for me, Sophy?" said Robert Chesney.

"No, Sir, not this evening. But you are not to go and repeat any thing of the bedroom ques-

tion downstairs. Jane wouldn't like it. You had no business to have been present when that subject was discussed, Sir."

"Why, Sophy, you appealed to me yourself about it."

"Yes, I suppose I did, Sir. I forgot at the moment how mischievous you could sometimes be. Here is Alice coming back again! She will set us all to rights."

As Lady Glenarvon entered the room, Jane instantly addressed her: "Well, Alice dear, what do you think of Sir Robert? Tell me that you think him looking well."

"Indeed I do, dear; but not altogether so happy as I would wish to see him on such an occasion as this."

Here Robert Chesney left the room, ere Jane Bentley could reply, "Alice! surely Sir Robert has no anxiety now,—none, I mean, that any of us can alleviate?"

"I must talk to you about it at another time, Jane. I think that one thing might yet be done for my father, which would make him perfectly

happy. Other cares will ere long overtake me, Jane, and it grieves me to know how much might be done for him, and yet that there is no one who will do it."

"Oh, Alice! you are speaking seriously, and also speaking as if you were inclined to blame me for some omission."

"No, dear, I am not blaming you. You have made the happiness of us all; but yet there is one thing for which I would kneel to you yet, if any prayers of mine could obtain it. Jane, my father will never reconcile himself to the idea that you will not marry Robert."

"And I, Alice, have solemnly vowed that I will never marry at all; least of all would I marry the one man whom I love most, and of whom I deem myself utterly unworthy. Oh! forgive me if you can, Alice, and get Sir Robert to forgive me too. Surely you are not going to tell me that our present happiness cannot last, unless I will submit to you, Alice. I cannot forswear myself, Alice; not even to regain your love."

"Dearest Jane, you can never lose *that*. Let us say no more. I spoke under the influence of disappointment, and because my father urged me to speak. Till this moment, dearest Jane, I have never been able to convince myself *that* you were so thoroughly, so immovably, in earnest. Henceforth you shall only know me, Jane, as a firm believer in your sincerity, though a reluctant supporter of your decision."

"And Sir Robert!" said Jane Bentley. "If you can but convince him that I am sincere, and not ungrateful!"

"I can and will convince him of that, dear, if that will restore your perfect happiness."

"Indeed, then, it will, Alice!"

"But I cannot promise you, Jane, that my father's wish will not remain the same; or that, in an hour of weakness, he may not recur to it."

Here Mrs. Verriker broke into the dialogue. She spoke in a voice so solemn that the contrast with her previous silence, and with her usual gaiety, at once arrested Lady Glenarvon's attention.—

"Alice! Sir Robert may well believe, and you may well believe, what will silence all future misapprehensions. Your brother understands and is convinced, Alice, how it was fated long ago that he would be the last of the Chesneys."

"But you forget, Sophy," replied Lady Glenarvon, "I have no faith in such predestinations."

All the native merriment of Sophia Verriker's manner returned once more, to enliven her final answer:—

"But there are some things in which you and I shall have to believe Alice, whether we believe willingly or not. The one standard idea of a prosy girl, like Jane, is more inexorable even than fate."

THE END.





